

ORAL HISTORY FILE 031 – JOYCE WHITBY (DRURY)

Joyce Drury came to Fairbridge as a 10 year old from Birkdale, Lancashire arriving in Sydney in June 1938. She was to stay at Fairbridge for 7 years.

This interview was recorded with Tony Myers at Joyce's home in regional New South Wales on February 21, 2006.



MYERS: Joyce, I'm going to ask you during this interview the reasons that you happened to get on a boat in 1938 and come to Australia?

WHITBY: Well, the first thing that comes to mind when you ask me the reason why I got on the boat, was I knew my brother was a long way away and had got on a boat, and I was looking forward to going to see him. But going back to the reasons, it was because of my home situation, and because my brother had gone, and because of the situation my family were in. Both my Mother and Father had come from just a cultural background than they found themselves in during the Depression, and my sister had won a scholarship to university. They were too poor to buy papers, and she found this ad. about Fairbridge in the paper, and brought it home and my brother, who was thirteen, he was so excited about going to Fairbridge . . .

MYERS: What was your brother's name?

WHITBY: Raymond . . . And going and feeding the horses, and wide open spaces. And so, really not having a clue what it entailed. And he, to cut a long story short, he set in motion, because of his eagerness to take this up, but it was my oldest sibling in the family who encouraged my Mum and Dad to do this because she couldn't see anyone else in the family getting ahead. And my Dad, he had been, he was a pianist and with the Depression, they weren't wanting him to play the piano, and he was fixing pianos and never had the money to have them fixed, and he ended up selling shoe laces door to door and my Mother, who hadn't worked at all because she was now married to this poor musician, and she found night work to do, nursing old people. So they really wanted the best for us.

MYERS: With your brother, Raymond, you're saying he'd left, he was already in Australia. He went to do what in Australia?

WHITBY: To Fairbridge.

MYERS: What year did he go to Fairbridge?

WHITBY: The same year, but he left in March.

MYERS: So, 1938.

WHITBY: Yes, 1938. And it was at the end of June when I arrived in Australia. But going to, in one sense, because I came, basically we were poor, but we had a happy family -I didn't ever hear my Mum and Dad have an argument – we always knew that we were loved. And we didn't have that sense of them sending us away, but that they were doing this out of caring for us.

MYERS: Did you have any other siblings?

WHITBY: Yes, six of us.

MYERS: Oh six. The eldest was Raymond?

WHITBY: No, he was in the middle. My sister was the oldest, she's ten years older, then me, and then a brother. Now she was going to uni, then the brother who'd actually joined the Army, and then Ray who was thirteen, and then myself, and then two younger brothers. And the younger brother, he came out to Fairbridge during the war. He came when he was seven.

MYERS: What was his name?

WHITBY: Frank. So two of us came to Australia and three, the youngest one was too young to come.

MYERS: So three out of the six came to Fairbridge?

WHITBY: Came to Fairbridge. Yes.

MYERS: Raymond the first, then yourself, and then Frank. And he came during the war.

WHITBY: Yes, he came via Canada because they couldn't come through the Suez, and he looked just so little when he arrived and I think I felt saddest to have seen my little brother come, because he was ten years younger than me. But I must say that the three of us, that we didn't ever regret coming to Australia.

MYERS: Now, what was it like when you, just tell me briefly the circumstances when you left. How did you feel leaving your parents and what was it like, do you recall?

WHITBY: I didn't think it through really. I had no idea it was so far away. I had no idea it was going to be for so long because the idea that they were going to come later, but of course, the war came and everything was put on hold, the plans of following us to Australia on a Ten Pound Ticket. So that was the plan, and I was just excited because my brother was at the other end of the journey.

MYERS: And that was sort of the inducement?

WHITBY: In a family the two oldest were the ones that were close and we were in the middle and we had that closeness that you didn't have with the younger ones or older ones. So he and I were very close.

MYERS: Did you parents come down to Tilbury Docks?

WHITBY: My Mother did. And saw us off.

MYERS: Can you remember that parting, how you felt, was it sort of sad?

WHITBY: No, I was just so excited. Because of being so poor and I didn't realise it was going to be for so long . . .

MYERS: Did they tell you very much about Fairbridge, or give you much information about Australia?

WHITBY: No. Ray was in Australia and he talked about horses and [unclear] was great, and this huge ship, but I know . . .

MYERS: What was the name of the ship?

WHITBY: The "SS Oronsay". But my Mother, she told me how she felt when she left and when the ship pulled out and she thought, "What have I done?" And she was very sad, but she said she walked past, I can't remember the name of the church, and really thought "What have I done, what have I done?" And went into this church and she said I just sat in the back, right at the back, crying and crying and crying, and then a real peace came on her and she knew that she had done the right thing.

MYERS: Were you a Ward of the State then? What's the technical . . . do you remember?

WHITBY: When? Before I left?

MYERS: Before you left?

WHITBY: No. Never. I was never a Ward of the State. No. We were extremely poor but we lived in, I think they call them a Council House. And I can remember my, well I think they told me, but I didn't ever remember being hungry because I think everybody in the street was in the same boat, I'm told that my brothers had to go and find bottles and that they would go and get, like sixpence for half a dozen bottles or something, and then with the sixpence, they would go to the biscuit factory and get this bag of broken biscuits. And Australians have said, "Oh yeah, we used to do that." And I said, "Was that your main meal of the day?" And they say, "Oh, no." And that bag of broken biscuits was our meal. There was no money like for food but I can't remember being hungry. I think it was that my Mother, all I remember, and my Dad was a peaceful man, and my Mother was happy. She always looked on the bright side.

MYERS: How many were there who got on the boat going to Fairbridge, can you remember the number of people?

WHITBY: Twenty-eight.

MYERS: There were twenty-eight. How many girls and how many boys?

WHITBY: Seven girls and twenty-one boys.

MYERS: Now can you just, what was the trip out, six weeks was it, roughly?

WHITBY: Yes.

MYERS: Can you remember . . . were you sea-sick?

WHITBY: The only thing that I can remember, the first part, because we had inoculations for small pox was it. And that was sore, and I was sea-sick for the first couple of days, but after that all I can remember is having fun.

I can't remember, only that sense of "I'm going to see my brother, I'm going to see my brother." I think if I'd gone first that would have been totally different.

MYERS: Where did you arrive?

WHITBY: In Sydney.

MYERS: Do you remember coming through Sydney Heads?

WHITBY: No, nothing at all.

MYERS: What age were you then?

WHITBY: Ten.

MYERS: So, you don't remember that. Do you remember who was there to meet you the wharf?

WHITBY: No, I can't remember that either and I can't remember whether we came on train or the bus. Other people have memories of this.

MYERS: From Sydney out to Molong?

WHITBY: To Molong. I can't even remember that. I think I was thinking of my brother and seeing him. What I do remember about that first night – now I came from England, and I came in June to Molong – and I have never felt the cold as I did that first night. We had blankets on the bed but the sheets, of course everything was new, and it was just, and getting up in the morning! And there was this frost, and even though I came from England, it's a wetter kind of climate up in Lancashire, the North-West. And I had seen snow but I hadn't seen frost that was on the ground. And yes, so that surprised me because Ray hadn't told me, my brother Ray hadn't told me anything about it being so cold.

MYERS: You don't remember how you got from Sydney, whether it was by train or bus, I imagine train. You didn't stay in Sydney for a couple of days?

WHITBY: No, we were met by – it must have been daytime – we were met by some important people and I think we had like a drink and a biscuit or something. I remember

when we left England we went to the Lord Mayor's Hall or something and had a send-off. So I remember that. I remember food more, don't I?

And then when we came on the ship, one of my memories was that at Cairo we got off the ship and we were feted there by Government officials and we went on a bus tour. I don't think we saw the Pyramids, but I remember that.

MYERS: You don't remember actually getting from Sydney to Molong<

WHITBY: I might have slept.

MYERS: Do you remember your first impressions? Who met you at Molong and what Cottage did you go to?

WHITBY: I went to Rose Cottage.

MYERS: And who was your Cottage Mother?

WHITBY: Oh, she was a funny lady. I can't remember her name but fortunately she didn't stay there long.

MYERS: Why do you say that?

WHITBY: I know Mr Beauchamp was the Principal and the lady, she wore skirts down to her ankles and she used to cook our evening meal and it was always awful and one night, this is a funny memory talking about food I probably remember more about food than anything, she made, I can't remember what it was, it might have been scrambled egg, and there were only seven girls, but we had two boys in our Cottage as well. But the oldest girl, (??? name unclear) Wickens, she said, "Don't eat this, it's rotten." And so she said to the Cottage Mother (I can't remember her name), "We're not going to eat this." And the Cottage Mother got up on a chair and screamed at us because she was shocked.

And then she sent one of the younger ones, it wasn't me, to go and get the Principal, Mr Beauchamp.

MYERS: When did you eventually meet your brother, Raymond?

WHITBY: Allow me to finish that story first, about the food and Beauchamp coming. That night, she was there, that same night, yes it was dark . . . [unclear]

MYERS: And how were you, what was the . . . ?

WHITBY: Oh, he was just really excited, he was thrilled to have me there, yes. He was full of smiles, he was two years older than me and he was always my “big brother” and I mean to say, he has died now, but we always remained close.

MYERS: Tell me, that story you were saying about the food?

WHITBY: And Beauchamp came – with his dog, little dog – and he said to this lady, asked her the problem, and she told him she’d cooked this and they’re refusing to eat it, and he said put some in the dish and if the dog, whatever its name was, eats it, the children have got to eat it. And he put the food for the dog and the dog refused to touch it and he said to one of the girls, “Pack it all up.” And he said, “Boil an egg for them, and some toast.”

MYERS: How did she react? The Cottage Mother?

WHITBY: She boiled an egg and some toast. But she wasn’t there very long. That’s the last I can remember of her.

MYERS: Who was your next Cottage Mother?

WHITBY: The next Cottage Mother was Mrs Oates. Mr and Mrs Oates that stayed there and they were a married couple and he looked after the orchard and the looked after the garden and they were people off the land that found themselves, because of drought – they still had property not far from Molong – and she was a school teacher and so he was a foxy gentleman and she was rather strict but she was very fair and yes, they were good.

MYERS: Just a work day – just give me an idea, a sense, of what you did, just any work day. What happened? What time did you get up in the morning? What happened, what did you do?

WHITBY: Well, it was all routine, and you had to get up, but your clothes on, make your bed . . .

MYERS: What time is this?

WHITBY: I think it was six o’clock, it was probably more like seven o’clock, it wasn’t disgustingly early, and at those times we used to go and have breakfast in the hall and so we’d go up there and have our breakfast and come back and we had jobs – oh, before breakfast, we had jobs to do like cleaning up our shoes and perhaps sweeping the floor or doing things like that, nothing too arduous – and then we walked to school. But when we came home there were always jobs in the afternoon before we could play. Whether it was weeding in the garden or, I don’t know how Mrs Oates managed to find jobs for all of us, but helping with the washing, hanging out the washing, doing the work, yes it was definitely we all had work to do, and we were expected to, but there was nothing that was unfair. But we had fun. Like, she had a piano and she played beautifully, and we often

had sing-songs around the piano. So, she was a fair person, but you had to work or you would get into trouble.

MYERS: In 1939, the war, 29 September – what contact did you have from your family – Mother and Father whatever, siblings – did you have much contact? During the war years, I was just wondering did you wonder how they were going. Was there much information given to you?

WHITBY: Well, we were made to write a letter home, I don't think it was once a week, probably once a month, so I got letters, my Mother used to write letters. And she actually thought we, now during the war, managed to send me out a tin of what she – it must have been my favourite biscuits, something like Anzac biscuits they called Flap Jacks – and I got this tin of biscuits from her that had come all the way from England. It probably cost the earth to send. But that was the only thing I can remember. I must concentrate on food. She might have sent me other things, but these biscuits that we all shared. But, no, we kept – my brother didn't write, but she used to tell me about my sister and my brother.

MYERS: Did Raymond get letters too?

WHITBY: Oh yes. Yes.

MYERS: So you were kept informed. But were you worrying about what you knew about the war, how they were going?

WHITBY: Well, we didn't know very much. We didn't read newspapers. Well, we knew nothing about, like, Darwin being bombed. No, we didn't. There was no television.

MYERS: Radio?

WHITBY: Yes, we had, all I can remember of the radio was that we used to sit down on a Sunday night and listening to the Lux plays. And we all had to be quiet listening to that. But no, as far as, I think, looking at myself, I didn't look, all you were interested in was that I was happy and getting on well with other people.

MYERS: How did you relate to, did you form some good friendships with the other girls in the house?

WHITBY: Yes, with some. Not with all, because I was an innocent looking blue-eyed blonde and I was always called "teacher's pet". I was Mrs Oates' pet, I was the headmaster's pet, and Mr Oates' pet – which I hated them calling me this. And I thought I wasn't treated any different to anyone else, but because I didn't get into as many pranks. But yes, I did get into trouble. It's interesting what I do remember. Mrs Oates had a son. They had one son and he boarded in Orange during the week and came home at the weekend.

MYERS: What age was he?

WHITBY: He was older than all of us, so I think about five years older probably, or four. But this little blue-eyed blonde didn't like him and I, I believe it's just what we would say now that he was "up himself", and we all thought that about him. And he teased me very much and I was tired because, having had four brothers at home who were always wrestling on the floor for fun, but [unclear] was his name and he annoyed me so much because he'd try and be funny. But Mrs Oates, she was very clever, she said, "If you're going to fight, you can fight." And in the dormitories we had these beds and we had the push the beds all up one end and she said, "Now, go for it and fight."

MYERS: This is the girls?

WHITBY: No, just me and her son! And he's alive and in Orange and I'll probably see him at the Reunion . . .

MYERS: Have you seen him recently?

WHITBY: I saw him, he came to Newcastle about five years ago. That's the last time. He's sick at the moment and he was, yes, I'll probably see him.

MYERS: Have you kept in contact with him over the years?

WHITBY: He wanted to marry me at one stage and his father said, "She's too good for you. Leave her alone." And he joined the Air Force and he visited my Mum and Dad in England and used to take his washing there if he had any needs and he got to know my sister – she's married and has two children – and so he became part of my extended family over the other side of the world.

MYERS: On weekends, what did you do?

WHITBY: At Fairbridge? Well, sport was going on all the time, like I hated cricket, but I played softball and we used to have to join in soccer and cricket. On Saturday mornings, again it was gardening and weeding or doing some little cleaning, working, but Saturdays there'd always be sport . . .

MYERS: Did you have a free afternoon?

WHITBY: I think we were mainly organised the whole time. Sunday was funny because of church, we went to church, but because I was a Wesleyan, and they tried to do the right thing by me, so I had to – and those that had a different religion to Anglican – had to go to the Anglican Church in the morning, then Sunday afternoon, it might have been free for everyone else, but we had to go into Molong to the Methodist Church. So I became, I forget what they call it, anyway, confirmed in the Anglican Church and in the Methodist Church. And I hated that because we had to stay quiet for church. Doubly good. And we used to have to get dressed up and walk, we walked into Molong to

Church, which I can remember that. We used to try and cut through the paddocks and of course, the lady that used to lead us, she had stockings on and we were getting over a fence and I got caught in barbed wire and I had blood everywhere and she ended up having to try and get to the main road and hitch a ride. She wrapped my leg up, took off her stockings and tied my leg up with her stockings, like a tourniquet, got to the road to get me into hospital so I missed out going to church that afternoon. I ended up in hospital with stitches.

MYERS: Just on that. Any illnesses while you were there? Were you sick? Did you have a normal childhood record?

WHITBY: They said I was anaemic. Which I think I'd been made to eat different to anyone else and I had to have these egg flips which no-one else had. So they looked after your health, they weighed you and measured your height once a month. But I must have looked very pale or something and I used to have these egg flips, which make me feel sick at the thought of having them because you were made to be different.

MYERS: They had a hospital there, didn't they?

WHITBY: Oh yes. In Molong.

MYERS: But at the school, didn't they have a little . . . ?

WHITBY: Oh they had like a what would you call it? Where you would go to have a cut or . . . but you wouldn't be hospitalised. When you had something like your appendix out, and you'd come back . . .

MYERS: Where would you go for that?

WHITBY: Into Molong. I had my tonsils out at twelve in Molong. But that was a wonderful experience too, because I was spoiled rotten by the Matron. Matron lived on the premises and as soon as I was over it, I'd be sitting with her and I don't know what. And then went and had my appendix out, and the same thing happened. The same Matron and she spoiled me rotten, so it was hard coming back after having this special attention in hospital.

MYERS: And how about school? Have you got many school injuries – how did you find that?

WHITBY: School was good. I had no problems at school. Again, I was the teacher's pet. It happened at Molong.

MYERS: Did you just have the one teacher, or a number of teachers?

WHITBY: Oh no, I had a number. I can remember one particularly because I actually was good at painting, and we used to go out to do landscape painting, which was really

nice. I can remember about playing cricket when I was at school, and I must have had a bit of a temper, even though I looked quiet and all the rest of it, like [unclear] and then the girls played rounders or something and one of the boys kept annoying us, so I railed into him and I was told to go to the Headmaster's office and have the cane. But, because I looked innocent, he opened the door and he said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I've got to have the cane because I was hitting John Wolvey." Now John Wolvey is a big guy, and I can't imagine little me, and apparently I had him on the ground . . .

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MYERS: Now, just a couple of other questions, Joyce. You talked about the food, and the impression I get is that you found it okay compared to so much volume in England, and there were some things you didn't like, but overall would I be correct in saying that you found the food all right?

WHITBY: Yes. Especially when, because Mr Oakes was the gardener and there'd be times when there would be lots of fruit growing on the trees, and strawberries, and we'd go out mushrooming and some of the farmers nearby would say, like after the rain they'd be all these mushrooms, and we'd have mushrooms. Or someone would say, a farmer would ring up and say, "We've got all these apples that are blown off the trees." And we would have to go and get buckets and buckets and buckets of apples and pears. So, we had fruit, like I remember, compared to England, fruit was a thing I got for Christmas in my little Christmas sock back in England. We got a few nuts, a comic and a piece of fruit and that was the Christmas stocking.

MYERS: How was the Cottage? You've talked about two Cottage Mothers, did you have any more?

WHITBY: No. Oh, wait a minute – Mrs Oakes left and yes, we did have another Cottage Mother, but it must have been near when I was getting ready to go, and we had a few changes, like Cottage Mothers sort of filling in. But no real permanent, like I remember having Mrs Forsyth for a little while. And I can't remember another lady but yeah, but that was getting near the end and I was preparing to leave.

MYERS: As you were coming towards the end of your stay at Fairbridge, and we'll get onto that in a minute . . . growing up as an adolescent girl, how about sort of, romances? With the boys? I mean, what sort of contact and were there what I called "dormitory romances"?

WHITBY: Well, with me, I can remember one boy trying to kiss me and I ran for my life. So, at that age, I wasn't – and I always thought, I'm not going to get married, I'm not going to have babies – and I probably thought kissing made babies in some way because of having coming from a poor, big family, and probably in my mind I thought I don't want that to happen. So my plan was not to get married. So that meant no kissing boys. So when someone tried to kiss me, I would run for my life.

MYERS: And being attractive, as you would have been, was that a problem? Because I imagine the boys would have, first of all say for you girls, and more boys, so . . .”

WHITBY: Yes. Well, one boy thought that he was my boyfriend and he was boasting about something that I’d rather not try to imagine, but he came out with my brother. And my brother heard him saying something about your withdrawing and he came to breakfast the next morning with two black eyes, the boy. And my brother didn’t get into trouble because they knew what he’d been talking about was a lie. And my brother would not tell me what he’d said either. He was protecting me, yes.

MYERS: While we’re talking about Raymond. When you left, Raymond obviously would have left?

WHITBY: Yes, he left before me.

MYERS: How long were you still at Fairbridge with your brother gone?

WHITBY: Well, he was what, three years older than me. Three years. And he went to a farm, which was really good, and there were two brothers and they gave him some land to, what do you call it? share-farming. And my other brother went to the same place later. And those two men, Mr Dodds, like the Headmaster of the school, and the squire, they spoilt me probably, but they took me out to visit my brother at – I can’t think of the name . . .

MYERS: Was it very far from Molong?

WHITBY: It would probably, like it seemed a long way to me. It might have been an hour and a half’s drive or something. But those two brothers, Penfold Brothers – they had something to do with Penfolds Wines – and then took me under their wings then as well, and they were all the time, because I loved reading, and they would send me books for my birthday and for Christmas and that. So they were really nice. No women. They were just these two brothers.

MYERS: When Raymond left, did you miss him, or had did it affect your life?

WHITBY: No, not so much because I had my younger brother there too, so that was the difference, because I was the big sister and he didn’t want his big sister fussing about him. But he was, yes he died when he was forty-five from a melanoma, unfortunately. But he, both my brothers, were pretty wild and especially my older brother. We’d go to the Molong Shows and a few other shows and that, and he was always the one that was getting on steers and bucking horses and all that kind of things like that, but both of them got the bartel (?) stick or whatever, often, I think, but they’ve both said to me, whatever happened to them, they always deserved it, because they knew that whatever they were doing they were doing wrong.

MYERS: When you left, what was the reason you left, just because you had reached a certain age – and what age was that?

WHITBY: Well, at fourteen and a half I left the actual school. And then I became a trainee and I had two years like traineeship.

MYERS: Doing what?

WHITBY: Learning to be a farmer's wife!

MYERS: And where was that – at Fairbridge?

WHITBY: At Fairbridge.

MYERS: And how did you find that?

WHITBY: Oh, really better than school. And we were doing things with the boys like hobbling up horses to go and fetch wood, and it wasn't only cleaning and ironing and washing and looking after babies and learning how to sew and cook. But to be alongside, if you were going to be a farmer's wife. You know, stooking hay, going up for rabbits, doing all kinds of things like that. So yes, there weren't people watching you all the time.

MYERS: Were you still living in Rose Cottage?

WHITBY: Yes. Still in Rose Cottage.

MYERS: And you did that for two years.

WHITBY: Two and a half.

MYERS: So you would have been around about sixteen, seventeen?

WHITBY: I was nearly seventeen when I left.

MYERS: What happened then, where did you go?

WHITBY: Well, I was always interested in design of clothes and I wanted to go to Tech but anyway, that didn't happen, but I went to Gunnedah . . .

MYERS: Why didn't it happen, any reason?

WHITBY: Well, it did in one sense in that they knew what I wanted and they said to the people that I went to in Gunnedah, that to see that I went to Tech one day a week, and learn dressmaking, sewing and design and all the rest of it.

So, when I left Molong, you were all outfitted with clothes for the big world and my new bosses, the Heaths, nothing to do with the Principal of Fairbridge who was Ted Heath, but they were holidaying in Sydney and I went there for the first three weeks because she was having a new baby and I was supposed to sort of be Nanny to the two children . . .

MYERS: Where did they live in Sydney?

WHITBY: Mrs Heath's Mother and Father – Mr Le Courtier he was Headmaster of Newington College, so I went to Newington College. And they showed me where I was to sleep, and it was up in an attic, which was a box room, and there was a bed in there and all these boxes and boxes. And, fortunately, I didn't have much to do except to help the cook in the kitchen and look after the children sometimes.

But it was the loneliest part of my life I would say. That first night, and I hadn't slept alone in a room by myself, yes, that was the first time I'd been in a room by myself. Now, Fairbridge hadn't prepared us for those kind of things. That was one failing I would say. Suddenly, in a dormitory, and here you are, and also, I was treated as a servant, which I wasn't prepared for that either – I expected to be with a family. But the cook took pity on me so she was really nice and she'd say, "Sit here Joyce." And I remember she took me to her home one night, she asked permission. And that was really nice. But I thought Mrs Le Courtier and they treated me very much like, you know, your place is in the kitchen, in the maid's quarters or whatever at Newington. And Mrs Le Courtier said to me on Sunday nights, "Joyce would you like to come down to my little [unclear] and listen to the Lux play?" Which was what we'd done at Molong. And I thought, "I've made it. I'm going to go and sit in her living room and be with the family."

And I came down and she had put a chair outside the living room door and the door was just ajar and she said, "You'll be able to hear it from there." And, of course, I walked up the stairs and cried my little heart out and I thought how could people be like that?

So then I went to Heaths in Gunnedah, went with the daughter and that, went up to Gunnedah on the land. And they, three brothers, they were on three huge properties. But I was with the Heaths that were from the Le Courtiers and very much, I had a room off the kitchen, and that was my domain sort of. But the life saving there was a Fairbridge boy there. And I mean to say, he tried to drag (?) me all the time and I was forever escaping from him and his clutches. But they had three Italian prisoners of war on the property and they were all married men and, they had children, and missing their families. And they just loved me, they saw me as their daughter.

MYERS: How did you find them?

WHITBY: Oh, they were like brothers. I loved them. But the Heaths were worried. I could see they were worried that I might have, you know, an affair with them. But there was no fear of anything like that with them. They just loved me as a daughter. And they made me jewellery out of a sixpence. Like, they made me silver jewellery.

MYERS: Did they teach you to make pasta?

WHITBY: Oh no, they were just, no. They lived in a shed. I don't know what they ate because I didn't go in their quarters as all. I used to go horse riding with some of them sometimes, and things like that.

MYERS: Did you like the life on the farm?

WHITBY: It would have been totally different, I would have enjoyed it, basically I did . . . but I wasn't prepared to be treated as a maid with that class thing. But interestingly enough, years later, quite a few years when visiting Gunnedah, because I'd married a Gunnedah man, and I was sitting in the car and I thought that's interesting, now this is maybe twenty-five years later or something, and I thought that's Mrs Heath, and she noticed me and she said, "I'm so pleased to meet you, Joyce." And she said, "I've been wanting to ask you to forgive me." And I said, "Why for?" And she said, "The way we treated you when you lived with us." Wasn't that amazing?

So, I think I was in shock.

MYERS: How many years were you on that farm?

WHITBY: We spent two years. But during that time, they went into town every Friday, and I went to Tech, and I met M[unclear] the farmer's daughter from the next property, and I got to know her and then she arranged sometimes to stay in on Friday night and go to the movies or go to a ball or something or other, and I'd usually be minding their children somewhere. But anyway, I asked them could I go to the movies on this Friday night, because my friend had organised a blind date for me with a Gunnedah boy, and he was the boy that I ended up marrying.

MYERS: What was his name?

WHITBY: Malcolm. Malcolm Rightly (?). But he – I didn't really like him at all, I ended up marrying him – but I had this blind date with him, and thought okay, but we walked out of the movies and whilst waiting for the [unclear] to pick me up, this girl walked up to him and just slapped him across the face so hard, and I said, "What was that all about?" And he said, "Oh, she's my girlfriend." And I thought, well I don't want to have anything to do with a two-timer, because he's already got a girlfriend. So, I thought that was the end of that. But the following weekend he cycled twenty-eight miles, we were twenty-eight miles, I don't know how many kilometres out of Gunnedah, and he cycled out there to see me, and I thought, "Stupid man, I don't like you." But anyway, I ended up marrying him.

MYERS: How long, I mean from the time . . . ?

WHITBY: Well, I left the Heaths and I went to Sydney to live with the Phelps (?) who was the School Headmaster, Mr and Mrs Phelps (?), because they knew I wasn't happy at the Heaths, and they said, "We're expecting a move to Sydney and you can come and live with us and the four children, we'll be able to pay you a little bit of money and send you to Tech at North Sydney," and things like that.

So I went down there and Malcolm kept writing letters and they said, "Why don't you invite him to come down, like for a long weekend or something?" And they thought he was so wonderful when he came, that I thought, oh he must be okay, if they like him.

MYERS: So he came down and so that's when the romance started?

WHITBY: He came down, and that's when the romance started, because the Dodds (?) approved of him, I think, but I got off to a bad start with him, two-timing, you know.

And then I went back to Gunnedah and married him.

MYERS: And what was he doing in Gunnedah?

WHITBY: Well, he's got a whole interesting story, because he was Dux of the school when he was fourteen, but his Mother was a stubborn person, and with four boys, and as soon as they turned fourteen and eight months, she took them out of school and she got them a job. And my husband, when he turned fourteen and eight months, she came home and she said, "You start at the bakery on Sunday night." Now, he'd been Dux of the school. He took his books back to school on the Monday and they couldn't believe that their prize student was going to be a baker.

So when I met him, he'd done his apprenticeship and he was a master baker, and to cut the story very short, because we ended up with our own bakery. And sold that and then ended up with the corner shop and that was when he thought, right, I'm not going to get up at two o'clock in the morning, I'm going back. And he got his Leaving and, at the same time, he became an apprentice builder so he could build our own house. And then he became a builder and then he saw an ad. in the paper for Arthursons (?) to get Teacher's Scholarships. Because he was now a builder, so he retired and came to Newcastle Teachers' College. We sold our business and his first teaching job was Canberra, and that's how we ended up in Canberra for twenty-five years.

And then he got his Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts and, anyway, then he ended up before he died as a Consultant to the Education Department. So he always said when he was teaching it doesn't matter what you start off with and you think, I'm not suited to this job, and he said, you know, I started, I didn't want to do bakery, but . . . and he would often encourage kids to you know, get a job and give it a go because . . .

MYERS: To gain experience?

WHITBY: Yes.

MYERS: Just to sort of finish up, how many children do you have?

WHITBY: Two girls.

MYERS: Two girls. And one's in Newcastle . . .

WHITBY: Yes, and the other one is in Inverell.

MYERS: And the one in Newcastle is doing what?

WHITBY: The one in Newcastle is married to a marine engineer and she's a schoolteacher. My other daughter's a school Principal now and her husband's a school Principal in Inverell where she's Principal just out of Inverell at Tingha, mainly Aboriginal kids there. And I have six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. And we're really so thrilled.

MYERS: And Frank, your brother, what happened to him when he left Fairbridge?

WHITBY: Well, he went to Penfolds on the farm, and then ended up, he became a mechanic in a garage and then he married the owner's daughter, because he managed the garage as well. And he went into, he learned to fly and then started crop-dusting. He married, his first love, who he really loved and she went off to Sydney and married someone else but then that didn't work out and she had four children, and she came back to Narromine and they got married and he eventually did get her, and they have a lovely few years together before he died. And my brother, other brother, he's married and has three boys and his wife died early from cancer as well.

But our family is more close than lots of people who live near one another.

MYERS: How about the family, your Mother and Father in England, and your other three siblings?

WHITBY: Well, my sister is in Sweden and we're the only ones left of the six, the boys have all died. We ring each other and talk as if she's just down the street, and I have a sister-in-law in Scotland and nieces, and we're in contact regularly.

MYERS: Do you have much contact with your Mother?

WHITBY: I went back when I had two little children, and we didn't have much money, we were new in the bakery then, and my Dad wrote and said Mum was in hospital, and I said to my husband, "Wouldn't it be awful if it was something serious and I didn't ever see her again?" And we were saving up to buy a vehicle to deliver bread, and he said, "Well, find out how much it costs (it was cheaper to go by ship then), and go and see her." So that's what happened.

And I'm forever thankful that my husband did that, and I went back home and my Mother got out of hospital and our favourite Godmum and there was just my younger brother was at home, Cyril, he was like in Year 12 at school, and Mum and Dad and like she had to go to the doctor once a month, but she was very sort of secretive about what was wrong with her, but she had ovarian cancer and we found out when she died, and we had five months with her and she went back to hospital just before Christmas, and then she died in February.

MYERS: What year was that?

WHITBY: Now you've got me. I would probably be twenty-five, so try and work this out . . .

MYERS: A good while ago.

WHITBY: It was a good while ago. She was fifty-eight.

MYERS: And your younger brother back there, he's dead too?

WHITBY: He joined the Air Force and he was killed, not the war, but it was after the war, and accident with a vehicle. And my Dad was still alive, so that was hard for him to see the younger one die.

MYERS: And he died, your Father?

WHITBY: Yes, he was ten years older than my Mum and he died, but my elder brother, not my brother that's in the Army, he lived near my Dad, and so he kept an eye on Dad.

MYERS: Just to conclude, the period you spent at Fairbridge, just briefly, what did you learn? What stood you in good stead and what, if there was anything, what do you feel was the legacy of that, so you can just give a final summing up?

WHITBY: I think probably it made me more self-reliant. I feel it was a pity, like for me personally, with not being prepared for the big world, because even though you know you mightn't have been happy there, or things that happened, but my experience there is a good experience but it was when I left sort of on your own.

MYERS: Do you resent that?

WHITBY: No, I'm not a resentful person. My Mother taught me to always look on the positive side and she said, when we walk out that door you're as good as anyone else. You can hold your head up high and you don't have to compare yourself. So we've always had a sense of self, it's okay, you know where you are and whatever you're doing, you don't have to put yourself down. Which I've realised it is such a wonderful teaching to have had.

MYERS: I think we'll just stop there Joyce, and I just want to thank you for giving the time and I certainly found it very very interesting and again, I just thank you for giving up your time and being part of this project.

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