Transcript of


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INTERVIEW WITH IDA WELSH.

INTERVIEWED BY THERESE COLLIE.

9 DECEMBER 1991

THERESE: This is reel 22 and the date is 9th December 1991. This is from Lunchroom to Boardroom Oral History Project about women in the labour movement for the TLC. And I’m talking to Ida Welsh, who at the moment is living at the Townsville Nursing Home, 200 Palmerston Street, Vincent.

Hello Ida. Can you tell me when you were born?

IDA: Oh, 1900, easily.

THERESA: So how old does that make you now?

IDA: What’s this year? This is 1991, well I’m 91.

THERESA: When will you be 92?

IDA: Next July, 5th July.

THERESA: Can you tell me where you were born?
IDA: Yes, in Grey Street Brisbane, just up there near the Victoria Bridge. We went back there and built a house there in Grey Street, another house, we had a rented house when I was born in 1908. And they pulled that down to use the block of land for Expo. So the site the Expo was on was where I lived all my life. We had to live there, close to town, so Dad could come home every night from Parliament House, otherwise we'd never see him. He'd have to sleep at Parliament House. So that's that.

THERESA: So who was your father?

IDA: Will I start from his early life? He was little boy who cleared away from home at the age of 15, from Heathcote in Melbourne and I have found out since he died that his family, father’s family, was a member of the Douglas Clan, who are heirs to the throne of Scotland. Before they got on to the throne of Scotland, Scotland decided to do away with the throne and unite with England. So you see the heirs to the throne of Scotland never got on to the throne. I've only found out the other day and it's very interesting. And I wondered why, when my brother was born, my grandfather wrote to Mum and said, ‘Will you call the boy Douglas?’ And now I know why he wrote that up. Because Mum wouldn't know that, because she's not alive, see. So I've got to write and tell that to my brother. He was born in Heathcote, it's a few miles from Bendigo, might be 20 or 30 miles, I wouldn't know, a few miles from Bendigo. He was born there and he was....want to know how he'd be now, do you? Well he died in...what did I tell you he died in ? 1923, was it? If you'd told me beforehand I could have had this all worked out for you. Bringing it all up at the moment, I'm probably not going to give it to you as well as I could.

THERESA: Can you remember when he was born?

IDA: When my father was born? 1850 something, I think.

THERESA: So from Heathcote, where did he go then?

IDA: When he was 15 he cleared out from home, he and his brother, and he worked his way all round Australia, round the coast of Australia. But when he got half way round his brother got killed in a mining town. I can't think of the name of it now, and he continued on. When he got up to the north of Australia there he took a job managing a station property and the blacks came on the station in a mob and they killed the overseer, so my father thought he might be the next one to be killed, so he got the black, and put him on a horse in front of him and had a gun and held the gun at the black fellow's back and made him take him to the coast. He left the property, see, and went to the coast. And when he got on to the coast there was a little house there with all the windows and guns sticking out of every window. He thought that was funny, so he went and knocked on the door, and it was a missionary's home. His wife
was in - I wrote this one up for the paper, I got paid for this one - and he used to go away and leave his wife there with all these guns round so she'd be safe.

THERESA: This is the missionary?

IDA: The missionary, yes. So the lady said to my father, ‘There’ll be a boat here in 3 days going down to Perth. You can sleep here, stay with me until the boat comes. So he stayed with this missionary’s wife and then he took the boat down to Perth and then from Perth.

Now what happened when he got to Perth? From Perth he set off overland and - all this stuff’s all packed away in there - and he made his way all the way round mining. He used to do mining as he went. Each town he came to he’d stay a while mining and that’s why he would never let us buy a thing off China man, because they used to be down in the depths of the earth digging their gold out and they’d send it up, they’d have someone up at the top winding the windlass and taking it up and then they’d go down again for another load and these China men used to steal the gold that they were digging out of the earth, so the Chinese used to get their money in the early days by stealing the gold off the miners. This is just what Dad told me, I’m not telling you this gospel truth. It’s just interest. And then the mining brought him to Queensland, and he landed at Longreach, and he knew a Mrs. O'Reilly, who kept the hotel in Longreach, he had known her years before somewhere and he came up to this lady in the dusk and he thought it was Mrs. O'Reilly, and he went up to her and gave her a smacking kiss and he said, ‘Hello Lou, it’s nice to see you’. And she turned round and it was my mother, a stranger that he’d kissed. Because Mrs. O'Reilly's girl was sick and she had asked Grandma if she’d let Mum go up and give her a hand for a few days while the girl was sick. Mum was up giving Mrs. O'Reilly a hand, so anyhow, of course he felt terrible and he apologized and so then she had to go home that night, it was pretty dark in Longreach, no electric lights in a bush town so he asked her if he could see her home, so she asked Mrs. O'Reilly and she said, ‘Oh, yes’, it would be all right for him to take her home and that was the first time my father and mother met.

THERESA: So what was you mother's name?

IDA: My mother's name was Mary Ann Mitchell.

THERESA: And your father's name?
IDA: My father's name was William Hamilton, just one name, and that's why he was always very adept at making sure we had two names, because only having one name he was in Clermont, I think it was up about '91 or something like that, and there was a policeman there and he had the same name as Dad, William Hamilton, see, and they both only had one name, and Dad went to the Post Office to get his mail one day and the postmaster said to him 'Hamilton, don't take that letter out.' And Dad said, 'Why, be damned, it's my mail.' He said, 'The policeman took that out, he read it and he put it back in the post office and I think there must be something in there why you shouldn't take it out.' He said - I won't swear in the interview - 'Nobody stops me taking my mail out.'

So he took it out, and when he opened it was from a man - you've heard of the Great Shearers' strike, haven't you? Yes, well, the shearers down outside Barcaldine were going to go on strike for better wages, and I didn't blame them in those days because wages were very poor, and this man had written to tell Dad what they were going to do, they'd had a meeting, three of them, in Blackall, and they'll tell you the Labor Party started in Barcaldine but that is all wrong. This first meeting - if I'd gone over to Barcaldine I'd have told them so but I couldn't get over - this first meeting in Blackall, there were 3 men at the meeting, I don't know their names - it's packed up, I suppose - and they decided to form a Labor Party, then they went down to Barcaldine and called a bigger meeting in Barcaldine so as to enlarge the group, see. It was the second meeting that was in Barcaldine, the first had already been held in Blackall, you see, with these three men. So anyway they formed the Labor Party in Blackall.

THERESA: How was your father involved in that in that meeting in Barcaldine?

IDA: Well because he was a shearer and he was shearing around Barcaldine and they wanted him to go over to this meeting in Blackall but he couldn't get away from the shearing and so that's why they came back and had the meeting in Barcaldine, he was a member, he was at that meeting at Barcaldine.

After they formed the rudiments of the Labor Party, they didn't actually form the Party, the rudiments were formed and they fixed it up later, he went back up to Clermont and I think there was a strike, the shearers were going to go on strike at Barcaldine.

Now my father was nowhere near Barcaldine but a man in Barcaldine wrote to Clermont telling him what they were going to do, so that made him an accessory after the fact because he knew what they were going to do, and there was another policeman in Clermont and his name was William Hamilton too and he went for his mail and got Dad's letter and took it out and he read it and he put it back in the Post Office. So the Postmaster thought there was something funny at him putting it back into the Post Office, so when Dad came in to ask for his mail, he said, 'Don't take out that letter, with William Hamilton on it, the policeman took it out and read it and put it back.' So Dad said to him, 'Well be buggered,' -being a man - 'Be buggered, I've done nothing', he said, 'they've got nothing on me. I'll take it out.' When he took it out and they were shearers at Barcaldine, they had decided to strike and they'd written to tell Dad of their decision, you see, and the moment Dad took the letter out of the envelope, of course the policeman knew what was in it, he put his hand on Dad's shoulder and arrested him. Dad said, 'I don't know what you're arresting me for. I've done nothing.' And he said, 'No, you're an accessory after the fact. You know what they're going to do, you've read the letter and you know.'
It's funny, isn't it awful the things that can happen, that you can do, he was an accessory after the fact, he read that letter.

So anyhow there was two or three of them I think, they took them down, they chained them together with chains, took them down to Rockhampton and they tried - when I get my things unpacked I could let you read them, I've got all the news-papers and that - and they tried them in Rockhampton and gave them three years on St Helena.

THERESA: So your father was one of the 14 men who were tried in Rockhampton?

IDA: Yes. Well you'd know about that, he was one of them. And they took them down to St Helena but Dad was never in jail on St Helena, the other men were in jail, Dad was seconded to the head of St Helena, the manager, to the house, to do the garden because he was a good gardener. So he lived up at the homestead, he was never in the jail, and he did the garden at St Helena. I've got those photos, I'll show you those photos when I get my things unpacked. You can have a copy of them if you want to. I've got them all, Dad's lying at the men's feet.

THERESA: In that photo of the 14 men who were arrested your father is lying at the bottom?

IDA: Yes, can you see it? Yes, that's my father. But anyhow they didn't stay 3 years in St Helena, they were released. Other people got into power and they came out. And I used to wonder when we were going down the Bay on the Government steamer in the holidays, when we'd get to Peel Island - Peel Island, [St Helena] I think it was where they were - they'd always put a beautiful bunch of flowers on board the boat for Mum and these came out of the garden that Dad had made when he was there. Of course I didn't know anything about all this, but these beautiful flowers used to be put on board for Mum. So then he married Mum and they went back out west, he was shearing in Winton and he decided to run for parliament, he ran and he was so popular that nobody ran against him. He just walked in and he was in for 23 years and he was never opposed, only once, and that man lost his deposit. So it wasn't very bad, was it? It wasn't a very bad record. No, I'm very proud of him, I really am, but he had a hard trot but it was his own fault for running away from home.

THERESA: So how did his politics affect your life when you started to grow up and go to school?

IDA: Well, politics? Well we never, ever worked at a polling booth, he wouldn't allow us children to work at a polling booth, but we used to go down there and there'd be cases of fruit under the table and have a handful of fruit or something like that. Mum used to be on the WPO, but I never worked for the Labor Party in my life.
THERESA: The WPO, you know that?

IDA: Workers Political Organisation. That was very active down there, they used to run all the things down there.

THERESA: What work did your mother do in that organisation?

IDA: She didn't do any, because she had seven children she had enough to do rearing her children, I mean she'd go to functions if they had them, but as for the actual working in it, she was a member, pay her membership fee. She had 7 children to rear, and a husband, when they were in parliament it was very hard on a woman, I reckon it's harder than on a man because the house was always full of men having meetings and doing all this, and a woman's got to dish up suppers to them. I reckon a politician's wife, she has a pretty hard life, I reckon.

THERESA: Were you involved in that work too, as a young girl?

IDA: Yes, of course. I stayed home I didn't go out to work. I've never had a job in my life. I'd love someone to give me a pay cheque. I really would. It'd be nice. Have the feeling Dad said 'Well you've got 3 girls and the eldest one was a school teacher, and the next one was the head of the State Insurance because she'd come top of Queensland in the typing exam and Jack Feeley was opening the State Insurance the next week, he rang her on the phone. She was after Dad to give her a job in the Government but he said, 'No, I told you I won't put my children in the Government. They can't say I shoved my family into the Government.' So anyhow Jack Feeley sees her name in the paper top of the list and he gave her a ring and he said, 'Alice is that you I see in the paper.' She said, 'Yes, why.' 'Well I'm opening a State Insurance on Monday and I want 20 typists. I'll give you the job of head typist.' Look she was beautiful child, she had lovely golden hair, grey eyes and cheeky as you like, and I can see her now when she came home that night. She stood at the end of the dinner table and she said, 'Huh, wouldn't give me a job with the government, would you?' And he said, 'No, I've told you I will not put my children in the Government.' She said, 'Huh, I'm in' Dad nearly fell off his chair. And so to be rude he said, 'Be buggered you are.' She said, 'I am so. Jack Feeley's opening the State Insurance on Monday and he's put me in as head typist and you've got nothing to do with it. You're only the Minister for Mines and he's head of the State Insurance.' So that was it. Oh, we had a lot of fun being a politician's daughter, I tell you. So she was in it for twenty years, in the State Insurance. She got married and the other one was a school teacher. So then of course, he said to Mum because our house is always full of men having meetings and all this, 'You'd better keep this one home to help you.' So I was kept home to help mum.

THERESA: How do you feel about that now?
IDA: I don't like that now, but still, well I had a good time, I'm not growling, I learned everything. If the other girls bought themselves a new dress I got a new dress, I didn't lose by it. But I was a trained singer, I learnt singing and I got that Wight Memorial Medal for music, I learnt the piano, I had a burglar and he took my medal. They said they'd strike another, and I said, 'Oh no, it doesn't matter, my name's on the Honor board in Brisbane, that's all that matters, the medal doesn't matter. Some second burglar could take a medal, you can't take the medal off the Honor Board. So that's that.

THERESA: Is there anything that you would like to have done?

IDA: I would like to have been a politician. I would love to have run for parliament but I thought wouldn't it be terrible for Mum to have Dad 30 years in Parliament and then have me. I thought she'd had enough of Parliament see?

THERESA: Why would you have liked to run for Parliament?

IDA: Because I was so interested in Parliament. I used to go down to Parliament House. The cook used to make us cakes in the kitchen and we'd go up in the gallery. Next time I go to Brisbane I'm going to go down to the opening of Parliament, I'm going to get Wayne, and I put Wayne Goss in a the Premier - don't put this in that - because they were up here you know, and Warburton was walking around, we'll be in power next year, patting them on the head, and it got on my works and I said, it was over at a function at Magnetic Island and I said, 'For god's sake, why don't you do something about getting you in. Walking around patting you on the head won't get you into Parliament. Why don't you do something specific.' So I said to Wayne, 'For heaven's sake get rid of Warburton when you go back and you might get into Parliament.' Lo and behold the next thing, I nearly died, Warburton had been put out as the head of the Party. I felt terrible, I said I'd better shut up. I'd better not tell anybody up here what I'd said. So I think he's made a pretty good premier, Wayne Goss, I like Wayne, very nice chap. They sent me a telegram for my birthday, he and Bob Hawke. I got one from Bob Hawke, too.

THERESA: What do you think about the Labor Party these days?

IDA: Well I don't care what party you are in, there are good and bad in the party and there are ups and downs in every party. No party just goes in absolutely, like that. But I think the Labor Party is the best Party for this reason, because they represent the greater majority of people, there are greater people in the labour force than are, what do you call them, up at the heads? The hierarchy, aren't there? I think
so. I don't vote for the party, I vote for the man, always, and I think that's how my father was in Parliament for so long. It wasn't the party, it was the man, because he was such a good man.

THERESA: What was he like?

IDA: Well he was about 6 feet 2 [inches] tall, I've got a photo, I'll show you, only it's packed away. You leave m your address and I'll show it to you. Taken in his robes in parliament House. He wore big, long, black robes. It's a beautiful photo. When he died these robes drove us mad.

Everywhere we went we had to have these long black robes in a portmanteau and it got on our works, so Lady Morgan, Sir Arthur Morgan's wife, Mum said to her, 'Eh, Lady Morgan, what did you do with the black robes when Sir Arthur died?' She said, 'You want to know what I did with them?' Mum said, 'Yes, I might do the same for myself.' And she said, 'I got a coat and skirt made out of them.' So Mum said, 'Oh that does me.' So Mum got a beautiful coat and skirt made out of these black robes of Dad's in Parliament house. I've still got it there. I don't wear it though. I always remember that she said I wonder what I do with them, I made a coat and skirt out of it. Mum never thought of that.

THERESA: Was your father a good speaker?

IDA: A very good speaker. Hansard are the people that take the notes and they printed in the labour daily whatever is it, The Standard, or whatever it is and they said that my father was the best speaker in Parliament House. They could get every word down clearly. The others used to mumble, half of them. Now I know I've heard them say that, and yet he'd never been an educated man, only self-educated. Always carried a Webster's Dictionary in his suitcase, wherever he went. I've still got that Webster's Dictionary, I think, yes, I have at home.

THERESA: What sort of things did he speak about? What issues were important to him?

IDA: He was more important about the backblocks, the people in the backblocks. Now when he got in as member for Gregory, there were women out there who had never seen the sea, didn't even know what the sea looked like, they were out there, Camoweal and Urangie, and all those places out there. So one of the first things he got put through Parliament was for a free rail pass once a year for those people to visit the coast, and the ladies could take the children down to the coast for the year. And I remember, I was one of the founders of the CWA, and here in Townsville we built those seaside huts down there. So
that when the women came in from out in the west they would have somewhere to stay. That’s just to show how the CWA helped to get the women the trips to the sea once a year.

Only ever once did a man run against him and he was in for 23 years. He died in 1923, he got in 1899, about 23 years, only ever once did a man run against him and he lost his deposit. You've got to get so many votes for you lose your deposit and he lost his deposit and no man ever ran against him because he was too good. And we used to get really mad, we wanted a fight, see?

And one night there was a man running in for South Brisbane, a young man, and he had no hope of getting in, we didn't think, so Dad thought he’d give him a hand. So he goes down and he said to mum. ‘Keep the children home tonight, I'm having a meeting down at the corner of Grey Street (we lived in Grey Street) to give this young chap a chance...

REEL 23

THERESA: Reel 23 (the December 1991, From Lunchroom to Boardroom Oral History Project for the TLC about women in the labour movement, and I’m talking to Ida Welsh)

Ida you were telling me the story about the young man who was running for the South Brisbane electorate.

IDA: He was a young man, he was very inexperienced, so my father being experienced decided he would give him a helping hand and there was to be a meeting at the corner of Grey Street that night, and we lived in Grey Street, so you can imagine how we were anxious to go to the meeting. But Dad said to Mum, ‘Don't let the children out of the house tonight. See they go to bed early. I don't want them hanging around the meeting.’ So Mum said ‘Alright’. So came 7 o'clock, just before the meeting was to commence and we said, ‘Mum can we go down to the paper shop for our comics?’ And she said, ‘Yes, but you're not to go down Grey Street, you go down round the corner, round Stanley Street to the paper shop and straight home.’ ‘Righto Mum’ Down we went, we got our papers, but we didn't come home up Stanley Street we went down Melbourne Street to the corner of Grey Street and we attended the meeting. And the meeting was very, no great hall or anything like that, it was in the open, and there was a table there and there was a chair on the table and there was Dad about 16 stone up on the chair. So just as we got there the whole performance collapsed and Dad went down on to the ground with his legs sticking up in the air. We screamed with laughter and we ran like mad up Grey Street home. When he came home he said, ‘Where were those children tonight?’ She said, ‘They were home in bed, they just went down Stanley Street and got their newspapers and came home again.’ So to be rude he said, ‘Be buggered they did! When I came flopping down off that table and chair if I didn't hear their shouts......’ I'll never forget that night, that was really funny to see your father with his legs up in the air like that.
THERESA: Ida, can you remember one of the opposite, maybe one of the worst experiences in your father's political life?

IDA: Well I reckon when the policeman in Clermont, did I tell you before, he was W. Hamilton, the same as Dad, and he took this letter written to Dad about what they were going to do in Barcaldine, the Labour men down there, was a shearer, I forget his name, in Barcaldine that wrote to Dad to tell him what they were going to do. Now Dad had nothing to do with the strike, this great big shearer’s strike, he had nothing to do with it because he was up in Clermont. And so when Dad took the letter out the policeman knew what was in the letter and he put his hand on Dad’s shoulder and he arrested him for being an accessory after the fact, because he'd read the letter in which he'd said this.

Dad had done nothing, but he read the letter, it was addressed to him and so he arrested him as an accessory after the fact. And he was taken down, they took him down in chains to Rockhampton - I've got all these photos, when I get my things undone someday, I'll get your name and address and I'll let you see them all. They'll be interesting to you. And they were jailed for three years in St Helena. But after 12 months they let them out, there was a new Government came in and they let them out. They only did 12 months. I've got a photo of them all somewhere, Dad's lying down at the foot. But he was never in jail in St Helena, he was seconded to the head of the St Helena to do 16.

His garden, he was the head gardener, for the man who ran St Helena. And I always had a beautiful garden around our house, Because he'd had experience.

THERESA: What about after, when he was a member of Parliament, when you were a alive? Do you remember any bad experiences?

IDA: Once he got into Parliament he was very well-thought-of member of Parliament, never had any bad experiences like that at all. Only thing I reckoned was I had to do too much washing up because the house was always full of politicians and their wives and everybody. Mum would spend the day before, Friday, baking cakes and tarts, and lord knows what because the house would be full on Sunday.

And he had the western electorate, and when all the westerners were in town, he'd say to them, ‘Well make our place your home.’ And poor old Mum, I reckon she was the cook, political cook, I used to call her.

And then when the war was on all those boys from the west that were in camp, they had no home and once again, Dad said, ‘Now you make our home yours while you're in camp. You've no home to go to when you get a night off.’ And we had an old German lived over the road and of course the boys would come in, and all being musical - I played the piano, my elder sister played the piano, the middle one played the violin, and my brother played the violin, and we all sang - plus the boys' voices on top of all that noise, they reported us to the police for making too much noise.

And one night we were all singing away, all the boys were in from camp and knock on the door, went to the door and there's the police force there at the door. They said, ‘let us in, girls.’ So we opened the
door and let them in and they said, We've got to put in a report, You've been reported for making too much noise. What are you doing here?’ So I said, ‘Alright, you listen, we'll sing you a song’ So we all sang them a song, so he said, ‘Keep up the good work, girls. The boys are better here than hanging round the hotel.’ And away they went. That was funny, that night.

THERESA: You said that you were very well educated, where did you go to school?

IDA: Well, I tell you a politician only got about 7 pounds a week in those days, we knew if we didn't study hard and win our education we couldn't have our education, we could only go to the state school. So I got a scholarship, my elder sister got one too, she got a scholarship to the Uni, and I went to the Girls Grammar School in Brisbane, on Gregory Terrace for 5 years. I got one scholarship first and then I got another second one from the school to continue on.

THERESA: Was it unusual at that time for women to be so well educated?

IDA: Oh well, I don't know, I never thought about that, I just thought oh well, if I'm doing anything I got to go right to the top. I don't stop half way. I didn't think about anybody else, so long as I got there. The same with the school, the Wight Memorial Medal for the piano. There was a lady called Ann Wight and she got drowned in Torres Strait with the ship the Quetta, and every year her family give a medal for music in memory of Ann Wight.

At school the girls were all so, ‘Oh isn't it awful this year, we haven't got anybody good enough to put in for the Wight Memorial Medal.’ All the schools in Brisbane competed, and I thought that was an insult, because I was learning music and I thought, well that's an insult, that is, so I went home and practiced up and I went back to the school and I went into the Headmistress's office and I said, ‘I want to enter for the Wight Memorial Medal for the school. We're not going to be the only school [not] entered.’ And she said, ‘Oh Ida, do you think you can do it?’ And I said, ‘I think I can do it. I'm sure I can do it.’ She said, ‘Oh well, I'll see the music mistress and see what she says about it.’ And Mrs. Burke said, ‘Oh well, let her have a go, no harm in trying, leave her have a go. I'll help her.’

So I got along there and I got windy the day it was on, and I left my music behind. I wasn't going to go in for it then, and they got me by the ear and they said, ‘Come on down, you got this far, now you're going to come down and you're going to finish. You can play off Annie Bambling's music.’ So I went down and I played off this other girl’s music and when I was sitting outside there, I thought that Mendelsson, I knew how Mendelsson wrote his work, how he wanted it played, I was a little know-all, I knew how he wanted those Mendelsson things played. And I didn't think the music teacher did, because I think they want to be played slow and dreamy and she made me play them too quick, I thought.
So anyhow I got on to the first one and I stumbled a bit over the runs in the first one - it was all runs and then I stumbled a bit. So I thought, oh, I've made a mistake, I'm not going to get this medal. I'll play these Mendelssons the way I want to play them, never mind Mrs Burke, see? So I got up, I sat in there, and I played this Mendelsson the way I thought Mendelsson, a little know-all, I tell you, wanted them played. And when I came out she said, I heard you in there.

‘What did you hear?’ I heard you playing Mendelsson the way I told you not to play it.’ I said, ‘Oh don't worry about it. I mucked up the first one, I stumbled and I couldn't turn the page in the first thing, so I'm not going to get the medal, so don't worry about it.’ So on the way home we took Ann Bambling in and we shouted her drinks, because we thought she'd got the Wight Memorial Medal.

And when we got back to school and about 4 days afterwards there's a banging on the door at our class, ‘Ida Welsh [then Hamilton] is wanted in the Headmistress's study. And I thought, what the devil have I done now? - I was always doing something - what have I done now? I was always doing something - what have I done now? And I got in and she said, ‘Well Ida, I thought I’d better call you in and tell you before it gets in the paper in the morning, because we've just had a notice from the Wight Memorial people that you've been awarded the Wight Memorial Medal for Queensland for music.’ And I just looked at her and I said, ‘Oh good god.’

And so I did and anyhow, to make matters short, a burglar stole the medal on me, with all my jewelry I lost the Medal. They said they's get another one struck but I said, ‘Oh it doesn't matter, my name's on the Honor Board in Brisbane, and that's all that matters. My name 'll go down. Another burglar might steal another medal if you get it struck.’

No I had a good life. I'm not growling about it, as a politician's daughter, I think I had a very interesting life. As I said, my only regret is that I couldn't have run for politics myself. Mum got too old then and I thought, oh well, I'd better devote my life to her. As she devoted it to politics, I'd better devote my life to her. She lived to be 99 and 3/4 and I looked after her. I didn't stick her in an old person's home. I see some of these poor beggars in here. The family just stick them in here and go enjoying themselves. I couldn't have done that. fortunately I had no children to stick me anywhere, I've got to run my own life. But they're very good to you here, I don't have any growls. I do a lot of work for them because most of them here haven't had very much education but I have, and I help the recreation officer, with reading things and all that. She's very good to me....

THERESA: What was your mother's politics?

IDA: Mum's politics? Well she didn't have any before she married Dad. Because she was born and reared in the bush, they traveled around, he was a mining engineer, her father, and he was out at Mt Perry, I think, and there was a job going in New Caledonia, and he took the job in New Caledonia and they all went over to New Caledonia. Mum was born in Mt Perry but she was reared in New Caledonia and she came back, Grandfather was ..... there. But she came back and they came overland from Sydney, when they came back from New Caledonia, they came overland from Sydney right up the Darling River to the back of Queensland. And then he took up land outside St George and he sold that and then he went to
Longreach. And then Mum and her brother drew a block of land in Longreach, and she had her own property, Lake Huffer outside Longreach.

THERESA: What was it called?

IDA: Lake Huffer. It was a big lake on it, beautiful big lake. I never saw it. We never went there because we didn't have time with Dad. But they used to say to Dad ‘You're a bloody pastoralist.’ They used to always say in Parliament, throw off at him, the other side. ‘It's not my property, I have nothing to do with it.’ Which he didn't because Mum's brother used to do all the work.

But he asked my brother when he was dying, never to enter party politics, because, ‘You have to sink your manhood for the party.’ It true too. It’s not what you want to do, it’s what the party wants you to do, see what I mean? Isn't it? So every party's tried to run him. Even the Labor Party and every party's tried to run him, but he won't. He's the grazer pure and simple. He was 7 years at the war, he was all through Trobruk and New Guinea and all that. Now he lives up at Cairns.

THERESA: Is this your brother?

IDA: There’s only him and I left. My two sisters are dead.

THERESA: You said that when your father died there was no pension for politicians?

IDA: No. We got nothing and I'll tell you - I don't know whether you'd better put this down - later on there was some Government land fell due, when they say ‘fall due’ they say the lease falls due, and it fell back on to the Government. And Mum had a little bit, she'd saved all her money and she had a little money from her family and she bought two small blocks of land outside Hughenden, because Dad wanted my brother to go on to the land, he didn't want him to be a politician. So she bought one block of land in my name - there were three there - one in my brother's name and one in her name, because the two eldest girls were married by then.

And there was the big block of Government land, the lease fell due, you see, and they had to release it. And Jack Feeley got into Parliament, he was a great friend of ours, a very good friend of Dad, and he gave Mum a ring he said, ‘Look you got a bad deal when Bill died. The Labor Party gave you bad deal, they didn't help you at all.’ She said, ‘Oh it didn't matter I got by on my own. I had my own things.’ He said, ‘You know what I'm, going to do. Your block of land doesn't join government land. I can't give you anything, but there's a thing going through Parliament that if you have a small block of land joining government land that's fallen through, the lease, you can be given enough of that land to tack onto your
block of land to make it a viable block of a land. Now, Ida's block joins the government land, Ken's block joins the government land. So I'm going to tack the small piece on to Ida's block, a small piece onto Ken's block to make them viable. And with the whole three, my [Ida's] block, and Ken's, and the block you've got, it'll be a viable property.’ So that's how we got Rosevale at Hughenden. Then I married the man next door, and I got his tacked on, when he died, onto mine.

THERESA: What sort of property was it?

IDA: Sheep property. See, Mum was off the land and Dad asked my brother not to go into politics so he went on the land. And he did 7 years at the war. He was a Tobruk Rat, the Tobruk Rats, you hear about them? He was in Tobruk, and they brought that lot back and they were so good they sent them to New Guinea. He was up in New Guinea. He’s up in Cairns now, at the moment.

THERESA: And your husband. He also was related to politics?

IDA: Yes. My husband's grandfather was the Prime Minister of England, William Pitt. His mother was Mary Pitt. Now William Pitt’s eldest son migrated to Australia and settled in New South Wales and I don't know who he married. My husband's mother she married William Pitt’s eldest son.

So I used to say to him, ‘We're going to have the future Prime minister of Australia.’ But we didn't have any children unfortunately. I think the accident he had might have had something to do with that. He had his hand cut off doing a good turn for a woman.

THERESA: Can you tell me that story?

IDA: I told you that story before, didn't I?

THERESA: Yes but not on tape.

IDA: No, I don't want to put that on tape....... he really was ...I have no growls about him.......and when my brother was at the war Mum and I couldn't have managed the sheep properties without him
because we had 27,000 acres. And he was there, he had no woman in his house and he was really an unpaid manager, I reckon.

No I’m not growling about my life, I'm happy how things turned out. I'm not fussy about being here because I'm sort of out of my element here. Do you know what I mean? They're very good to me, everybody wants something done. I had to help the cook make the Christmas cakes. She came up, ‘would I come to the kitchen, help her make the Christmas cakes. Then the recreation officer, I have to help her, and everybody.

But I think of it this way, I'm not skirting about myself, but if you've had enough know-how or brains, as you call them - I won all my scholarships, they never paid a penny for my education - well if you've had that know-how, I think you should share it round. Brains aren't given to you just to sit down. They're my brains, I've done this with them, I'm going to hang on to what I've done with them. I think God gives you the brains - don't put that down, that's awful, like I'm telling you I'm brainy - I'm just explaining you've got to have a few brains to do things, haven't you?

THERESA: Do you think there's been enough recognition of women by the Labor Party?

IDA: No I don't, I really don’t. Some have done a lot, Margaret Reynolds, for instance. But some of them, they've got an element into the Labor Party. The Labor Party today is not the old Labor Party that was.

There is a little of an IWW element, I don't know what the IWW was, the Independent Workers Association - I can't remember what the first work was - Independent Workers of the World - that's what it is, isn't it?

THERESA: Independent? [Industrial]

IDA: I don't know - IWW - I don't know because it was formed when I was very young and I just don't know about that. ‘I Won't Work’ - that's it, it's all the labourers in the Labor Party, the IWW, 'I won't work'.

THERESA: Do you think that's the attitude now?
IDA: Yes, ‘I won’t Work’ - the government, everything, everything off the government for nothing, without working. IWW, that's what they are. But I got really, you know Vi Fox? - I been out there a few times to functions.

Now there was an election meeting and I went on, outside the Courthouse, I sat all day long on the polling booth and gave the numbers out, the whole day long, and afterwards, that night, Pam Reynolds, I was fond of Pam Reynolds too, I was really mad, Jeff Smith - do you know Jeff Smith? He's nice he's the Labor member for down here somewhere in Townsville, Pallaranda way, I think it is. Don't you know Jeff? Jeff's a nice chap, I want to introduce you to Jeff Smith. So he came along, and I'm sitting on a polling booth all day long and he came along about half past 5 or 6. Now the Labor Party was having a function after the polling booths closed that night, and he said to Pam, it was at Pam's place, ‘Is Ida going?’ She said to him, ‘No’ I thought to myself ......who is that there, who is out there, I think that's the secretary, she's got a very loud voice. So he said, ‘Is Ida going to the function tonight?’ And she said, ‘No’ straight out in front of me and I'd sat on the polling booth from 9 o'clock in the morning until half past 5 in the afternoon. And I thought that was an insult. So I am not sitting on a polling booth for the Labor Party any more.

THERESA: But what do you think the Labor Party has done for women in this society? Do you think there's been any changes by the Labor Party.

IDA: No, I don't think so. I think women's role's been the same as it was originally. I think it's been stronger, if you know what I mean, it's been stronger. But the same role. You can’t have women at the head of a thing. Now look, man was born before woman, man was born the boss, wasn't he? God made man the boss of the universe, not us, he didn't give us the universe, did he? You feel as if you're made the boss of the universe. Men are bosses, I don't care how nice they are.

THERESA: So you think that's all right, that man is the boss and women always the support?

IDA: Yes, man is the provider, the woman can't be the provider when she's rearing children, when she's having children she can't be working and providing. Man's the provider, and woman's the home-maker and the family-maker. That's just my idea.

THERESA: Is there anything else you'd like to add, Ida?
IDA: Well I don't think so, only thank you very much for being interested in me, that's all. I'm going to write a book. I'll give you a copy of my book when I write it, because I've got one little story about Dad and I wrote that up for a paper once, I got paid for it. I told you that one about where he was going all round Australia and he came along a fishing village with guns sticking out of all windows? He knocked on the door and the woman opened the door and her husband was a missionary. And when he went away he left her there so she'd be safe with all these guns sticking out of the windows. So she told him there was a boat coming from Perth in 3 days, and if he'd like to wait. And see, he'd cleared out from the station he was managing because the blacks had come in and killed the overseer, and all the white men.
From Lunchroom to Boardroom was an oral history project by historian Therese Collie and visual artist Judith Hewitson, supported by the Oral History Association of Queensland, the Union of Australian Women and the Trades and Labour Council. The objective of the project was to record the stories of a wide variety of women who participated in the Queensland Labor Movement from the 1930s through to the 1970s. Throughout 1991, sixteen interviews were conducted with prominent activists such as Connie Healy, Susan Dickson and Marie Crisp. Connie Healy was a member of the Australian Communist Pa Women in Ancient Times. Surprisingly perhaps, ancient history records many strong female figures - rulers and warriors who did deeds the history-writers thought worthy of recording. Cleopatra, Boudicca, Esther. Their names echo down history to the present day. The first poem written down, which has survived to the present day, was written by a woman called Enheduanna. Modern History is generally seen as beginning in the late 1500s with the Renaissance. While the Renaissance artists painted beautiful female nudes, the Renaissance did not seem to greatly affect women's historical experience. If anything, women's role became more deeply defined as the homemaker and nothing else. Women--Personal narratives. Geographic Name. Oral history interviews with Holocaust survivors living in Argentina, produced by Centro de Documentación e Información sobre Judaísmo Argentino "Marc Turkow," Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina-Comunidad de Buenos Aires (AMIA). Oral history interview with Flora Abzac. Oral History. After 1946; other Jews active in the Radical movement, including Berta Feiguin de Ferrari (from the Cordoba province), Simon Goldstraj, Simon Junin, Arnoldo Kronhaus, Rozenkraz, and Bernardo Sweitzer; never experiencing anti-Jewish bias from anyone, especially not in the years of Eichmann's capture and the debate of the relations with Israel; the popular anti-Semitic demonstrations of 1959; his policy. Activist in the radical movement, 1930-1960, the International Labor Defense, the Communist Party: oral history transcript / and related material, 1976-1980. Item Preview. remove-circle. Evidence reported by marcus lucero for item activistmccorrad00larurich on Sep 21, 2006; visible notice of copyright and date; stated date is 1980; not published by the US government; Have not checked for notice of renewal in the Copyright renewal records. Copyright-evidence-date. 2006-09-21 19:11:09. Copyright-evidence-operator. marcus lucero.