



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Dorothy “Dot” Elsum

Interviewee: Dorothy “Dot” Elsum

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historian

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Please note that the interviewee has reviewed this transcript. Words in italics have been added at the request of the interviewee. Only material in this final transcript may be cited or used for publication or exhibition.

School days

SR: Tell me about school.

DE: I remember a Miss Warby at school.

43:53

DE: I remember a Miss North. How I always remember her - I'd be about 12-ish I suppose, I don't know - and all the kids at school - they taught 5th and 6th, 7th and 8th, they had a glass door at Eastern Road State School that they rolled back. She was quite elderly. You didn't have a job just for a year in those days, you started as a trainee teacher and you went right through until you were 90 if you could still teach. She was a dear old soul and she used to have maiden-hair ferns all along the windows. She used to send the boys over every Friday to South Melbourne, the football ground - in those days you got plenty of horse manure - and a bucket and spade for her damned smelly plants. (laughs) In the wintertime she'd sit right up - we had a fireplace - quite modern in those days - and we'd have a roaring fire. Apparently whoever looked after the school had that going by the time we went there. Poor old Miss North - she was probably only about 40 or 50 (laughs) - the boys used to bring little crackers in and they'd throw - into the fire. (laughs) Every couple of minutes. "Oh!" "Oh!" She just thought it was the crackling of the fireplace. Well we'll get away from Miss North.

Then there was a Miss Warby. The thing I loved about Miss Warby was that she was so well-dressed - she was a 'Miss', and she'd be about 50. My last teacher I remember was a Mr Jones. Now dear old Mr Jones, I absolutely adored him. He was a First World War digger and he got gassed, and of course every now and again he'd (sucks air in) the poor devil trying to breathe. Anyway he went on to be a headmaster at one of the schools out near where I lived in Parkdale. But it wasn't Parkdale it was Moorabbin or somewhere like that. I liked him because he'd be teaching us and then all of a sudden he'd start talking about the First World War, and of course we'd all be very interested because we didn't have to do any schoolwork.

I learnt a lot about Gallipoli and that from him. And we had a Mr Gould - see how I can remember as I get a bit older - who was our headmaster. He was rather a big man, big build and that, but he was very, very nice, I liked him a lot.

That's all I can remember about school. I left at the tender age of 13 going on 14 because my birthday's in August so Mum said - but she didn't realise that I didn't go for my Merit and that was the mistake of my life.

SR: Why is that?

DE: Well she took me out of school before I went for the exams.

48:06

SR: What would have changed if you'd had your Merit certificate?

DE: Well if I'd got it - maybe she thought her kid couldn't get one - if you went for work somewhere and you showed your Merit certificate it showed that you weren't brainless sort of thing. My sister was doing dressmaking and she took me on as an apprentice, that's the only reason I went on. But she got sick of me.

SR: The school at South Melbourne, do you remember much about the building? Tell me about that.

DE: It was a brick building. I do remember outside was a gum tree, and we used to have the caterpillars, and of course we all had glass cases and we'd watch them turn - all that sort of thing. The thing I remember mostly about it, it had a sort of a long - stainless steel I think from memory - sort of sink with taps all along to wash your hands and you could drink, the water went up I think - maybe I've got another place. That was that building. Then there was what they called shelter-sheds with a big compound where we used to play games and things like that.

SR: What games do you remember playing?

DE: Don't forget it was Depression. We'd have our little suitcases, we'd pile them up and we'd jump over them, things like that. I played rounders, and played basketball. Also we did our running over at South Melbourne, the South Melbourne football ground, when there was anything on, that's where we ran races. Because of my long legs I won one of them. At the other end of the school was another set of classrooms, possibly the smaller classrooms for the younger children.

SR: You liked school?

DE: Well I wasn't good at it, I was like Olive Oil, I was tall and undeveloped and that, but I could run, I was okay with the running. Yes I liked it fairly enough.

SR: Did you walk there from all your - ?

DE: Oh yes. That's why we were - most of us were slim. You stood out if you had a bit of *weight* on you know, really did. I used to walk along Tope Street, and down another street whatever it was, then I'd walk along Eastern Road to the school, Eastern Road School. Then I went to the Methodist - it was a little wooden building. That was the best time of my life actually because that's where all the action was.