

Gawler Oral History Project

"The Growing Up Years"

Mayor Karen Redman interviewed by Judy Gillet-Ferguson

September 2017

Transcript of interview as follows:

Judy: Today I'm talking to Karen Redman who is currently the Mayor of Gawler and it is Wednesday 27th September 2017, and Karen has also been a councilor before she became Mayor. I'd like to talk about your childhood. Can you tell us a bit about your parents and how they met?

Karen: My parents' names are Ray Willis and Karita Willis (nee Meaney). She always used the term "*Meaney*" rather than "*Mainey*". She was born in Hamley Bridge. My Father was born in Mount Barker and Dad's family moved to Hamley Bridge, and I think from memory his parents they had a farm had a farm at Meadows and during the Depression they lost that farm. He ended up working for the Railways and moved to a variety of places. In fact they were in Smithfield right near the Smithfield Primary School just around the corner from Anderson Walk. They didn't have a lot of money and ended up at Hamley Bridge, and that is how my mother and father met. In fact, two brothers ended up marrying two sisters. Mum was a good pianist and was heavily involved in the local Hamley Bridge community. Was born there. Went to school there. And she played the piano. Dad has a very good singing voice and I remember a local woman telling me ... Mum and Dad never told me this ... this local woman said, "I remember both your parents", it was at my Mother's funeral would you believe ... and the woman's name was Patti Wedding ... and she still lives at Hamley Bridge ... and she said, "I remember when your Father and your Mother were in the Hamley Bridge Institute on stage singing a duet". Can't remember what the production was that would probably have been early fifties. And it was a boom time in Australia so country communities had lots of dances they used to go dancing at all the local halls. They were very good ballroom dancers. And I think they were well known, ... and I think life was a lot of fun.

And so, they married in 1957 in the Hamley Bridge Catholic Church. So, I have a Catholic background.... very strong background in that area. Both my mother and my father's family originally their ancestors came through the potato famine from Ireland. So, Mum's father's family ... the Meaney's... settled at Fords in Kapunda, which still has some derelict structures, an old railway siding it's a really interesting spot for those people that know Fords near Kapunda. And so, they settled there ... very large Irish Catholic families.

Mum's parents ran a butcher shop and her mother ran tea rooms. I knew my Grandfather use to stay at Hamley Bridge in school holidays when I was primary school age, and every school holidays I wanted to go up to Hamley Bridge and stay behind the butcher shop with my Auntie my Mum's sister who never married and she was well known in the community. Her name was Tass or Kathleen and we use to call her Auntie Tass. She was a fantastic female ... woman. Women who never worked and had careers were very strong

women in their own right .. and I always believe that. And when I look at strong female examples or mentors ... it's not necessarily the academic record they have it's their strength in their community. And so, I have had the benefit of many strong women particularly on my Mother's side.

As a child I use to go and stay up there every school holidays and live behind the butcher shop ... watch my Auntie cook ... watch my Grandfather work extremely long hours. He always wore the blue and white apron, and I remember the sawdust in the shop out the front, the beautiful sideboard in the Dining Room, there were all these little rooms behind the butcher shop and they had this amazing orange orchard out the back ... a separate outback toilet ... it was the cleanest outback toilet I've ever seen. It was very well looked after. And then there was the train track out the back the old Hamley Bridge train line and there were constant trains coming through the Bluebird, freight trains and I learnt to love the sound of the train at night and it has never been a sound of irritation to me.

My parents when they got married promptly left Hamley Bridge. Dad was a painter and decorator and he had his own business. Mum was very good with money. She was a book keeper and she had also worked at the local exchange. In fact, she worked here in Gawler at the Gawler Exchange, .. and she was a supervisor ... never talked about it. I found this out recently when I was Mayor. She never talked about it. The local people always had a great love for my mother because she was very endearing .. well, ... you remember ..

Judy: I do

Karen: So they left Hamley Bridge and they moved to Strathalbyn and that's where all of us kids were born. I was born in Strath. I was the third out of four children. Mum in fact had seven pregnancies and when we eventually moved to Gawler she had two more. She had one when we were in Victoria. So we were born in Strathalbyn. I recently went past the old house, when we were in Strath the other week. And we were there from that time till 64/65, and so we were born my older sister, my brother, myself and my younger sister. At one point my mother had three children under four. Sixteen months between my brother and myself. Sixteen months between my sister and my brother and there were three years between myself and my younger sister.

Judy: Well that's a bigger gap!

Karen: Oh yeah!! ... Huge!!

Judy: Is that where the two babies that didn't survive..?

Karen: I think there were two miscarriages here in Gawler and then there was a miscarriage when we moved to Victoria. We ran a hotel. A country pub. My parents ran it, ... but Mum really ran it. Dad was very charismatic, and we moved to Victoria and took up the lease of a local hotel called the Criterion Hotel in Rushworth ... which is gold rush country. It's about an hour from Bendigo. It's a very cold place. I have so many wonderful memories of this little town little gold rush town ... beautiful old heritage buildings. Our pub was the top pub and Mum never liked calling it a pub and so we had to call it "the hotel".

And they ran a really slick operation. They were good business people. Dad was "front of house", ... Mum did everything, we did meals, we had typical hotel room accommodation, they had events my father was involved with the local ... I think the high school had a dramatic society and they did Gilbert and Sullivan. Back in the 60's it was really quite popular I think. They had The Mikado and The Pirates of Penzance. I remember seeing an envelope come through to the hotel ... a letter ... the lead role was Frederick in Pirates of Penzance and Dad was known as Ray Frederick Willas. He was that popular. He was a very good singer. Yeh! so there was lots of activity and lots of vibrancy, lots of people coming through the hotel ... but lots of hard work too. I started school in Rushworth and I remember being in a specialist Math's class when I was in Reception or Year 1 or something.

Judy: Why

Karen: I think because I was good at Math's. They must have had a program of developing kids. It was a local Catholic school.

Judy: Was it a big school.

Karen: No. I remember it felt big and that there were a lot of kids. And there may well have been. I can't remember how many children went there. I always felt that I learnt a lot there may I say compared to here. (laughter). I think there were elements of that ... I didn't want to leave Rushworth. I was only in Grade 2 or 3 when we left ... and I loved it ... we used to have the run of the town. The things we used to do (laughter).

Judy: Was it the only school or was there a State school?

Karen: There was a State school and that was quite big as well. There was a local High school ... but it might have been a regional school. Because there were only a few hundred people in Rushworth ... but a tight-knit community. We learnt to swim there. There was a local swimming pool. Mum had never learnt to swim, and she said "you will all learn to swim because I always wanted to learn to swim ... we didn't have a pool ... and I wasn't allowed to swim in the River Light" ... near Hamley Bridge. Her mother would never let her because it was dangerous. So she felt very strongly that we had to learn to swim. I learnt to swim, and I still remember learning to swim in that pool. Beautiful people. Kids ... that I am still friends with now.

Judy: I was going to ask about that ... fellow students, teachers.

Karen: I don't remember my teachers ... their names. I remember the people and the kids ... because there was a bit of a gang of us that use to run around. (laughter) We were so little, but we use to have the run of the town. Literally. We were always off exploring. There was an old burnt out house across the road from the hotel. And in Victoria, and in many country towns, the name (Rushworth) reflects what happened. The gold rush was huge and there was an old gold mine called "Whroo" ... and it's now quite a tourist attraction. But at the time it was derelict, and we were not allowed to go there ... you know ... mine shafts. The whole place was littered with shafts, and the middle of the town had an old tram track ... and there was a playground in the middle of the street ... and you had one-way streets up one-way .. and you'd go up the other way. And an old traditional main street with shops either side. A

huge main street .. that reflected that gold rush activity. A massive railway network there of course ... again because of the gold mine and the need to move the gold out. This town was in the middle of the bush. So we were surrounded by bush. It was gorgeous. My Dad was captain coach of the local football side. I was too young to play netball, but I remember swimming.

I remember that we had our own country hospital at Rushworth. We were not allowed to go in .. because we were kids ... and see our own mother. She had a miscarriage and we didn't know. I recall looking through the window and seeing her but not being able to visit her.

We had wonderful people who worked in the hotel and were great friends of my mother. I have this great memory of this cook .. Mrs. Muir ... and she wasn't a very good cook. (laughter). As a child ... I never forget it ... there we were ... there was the dining room, the ladies lounge, the kitchen, and then the old back room where we kids ate ... and there was an old back stair we would go up to where we lived. There was the back private section and then the public rooms where people stayed. So were not at any cost allowed to go into that formal area ... and, of course, we always did (laughter). And there was a beautiful old staircase there ... and we use to slide down the bannisters. Of course, one time I fell off and one of my friends, Jimmy Morgan, fell off and he had this big lump on his head. It was massive. I can still see it ... this lump that Jimmy had. We had lots of fun, but this cook ... Mrs. Muir ... dished up this lamb's tongue ... would you believe ... and it was hideous! (laughter). I still remember her dishing it up and saying; "you will eat this". And I thought; "I'm not eating that". (laughter). So! ... not the best ... offal ... awful. (laughter). But you have to laugh.

I contracted scarlet fever. It's a really bad throat infection. And so my parents thought this is terrible. Maroondah Hospital was a large hospital. There is a basin or reservoir called Maroondah Basin ... I assume it's still there ... which was the water source for the town and region. We were, of course, highly contagious. I could barely swallow. It was terrible. We got put in quarantine. We got shipped into this hospital, in isolation. So the decision was ... "Well Karen, we're running a business"; .. and I said; " So you shipped us off to the hospital", "yep!". And they kept the pub going. So we all got put in hospital ... all of us. And I remember getting the procaine penicillin injection ... these massive white ... huge injections. It was awful. We were in isolated glass cubes. We were completely isolated from everyone and from each other. If you think of a row of beds with glass partitions and doors ...that you couldn't get out of. Again ... I remember this nurse who came in ... my first experience of nursing, which wasn't very good. And she said; "What do you want for dinner?", and I said, "What's this bonox?" She said "Oh! If you order it you have to drink it". "OK". I didn't have any idea and they dished up this bonox which was hideous, salty, and horrible and! ... I didn't drink it! (laughter). And so I didn't get anything else.

Judy: Did you all have scarlet fever or was it just you?

Karen: Well I know that I had it really bad and, I think all of us had to be put in isolation ... and I'm not sure if my older sister had it slightly less than me. Yeh!

Judy: How long were you there?

Karen: It was a few weeks. Not just overnight. It was all quite difficult, and I remember hating it you'd just sit there, and we were only little. I remember they had a kid's party ... and I could see this kid's party across the corridor and down through the door. And I'm going; "I can't go to the party". It wasn't very nice at all. But I must admit I still found something to laugh at with the bonox. So! maybe that's where my defiance and resilience came from. (laughter).

Judy: How long after that did you leave?

Karen: We came to Gawler at the end of 68/69, so we were there in Rushworth for three years. I do know that Dad wanted to stay on and Mum said "No", ... because it was killing her ... exhausting. Loved the people. And four kids. We came and settled in Gawler. I remember when we came back we actually stayed in Hamley Bridge initially, and it was quite exciting for my Mum ... she was home. We settled here, and we obviously have been here ever since.

Judy: Where were you in Gawler when you first came?

Karen: We settled on 63 Carlton Road, and it was always cold ... prefab ... I think it was asbestos actually (laughter). It's still there and it was a big property. We still had to share. My brother had his own room and us three girls had to share which was not unusual. And we got involved. We had to ride our bikes to the Catholic school which was St Josephs in Church Hill, which is where St Joseph's Hall is ... that use to be the primary school. And then halfway through they opened up St Brigid's and we finished our primary schooling there.

What can I remember about 63 Calton Road? Again .. we were used to being free agents ... and go running and we'd go out all day ... when we weren't at school of course explore the neighborhood .. down through the Gawler East hills ...down behind where Deadman's Pass is. That was all pasture land and so we'd run and jump in the paddocks.

Judy: Did you have any hobbies, pastimes?

Karen: Hobbies? Well we continued our swimming. I used to swim every night at the Gawler pool. I swam for well over ten years and so that was a big part of my life. I did a lot of sport. We didn't play cards. Played Monopoly a lot. We'd say the Rosary ... oh! I couldn't stand it. (laughter) I just couldn't do it. We'd sit around as a family and say the Rosary. It felt like it was eternal but I remember not enjoying that. We went to Church a lot and I've always enjoyed going to Church, and I still do. So!, it was sport. I used to swim, play netball in Winter, and swam in Summer, and that took up a lot of my time. As kids we use to run around and explore. We played "eye spy" in the car and we use to spend a lot of time going to swimming carnivals in the country. Went all over South Australia for swimming carnivals ... nearly every weekend. And we'd always play "eye spy". But Monopoly was a big game as we got older. We used to play this game ... which is rather violent ... probably shouldn't say ... called "let's have a f.i.g.h.t" ... with my brother. We'd go .."come on" and we'd practice boxing each other. But as he got older he got too strong (laughter) and I said "No, you're too strong now". It was all in fun but (laughter) it was probably the worst game we played. The things kids do!.

Judy: What do you remember about Primary School?

Karen: I was taught by Nuns. Some of them weren't all that good. One in particular was fantastic. Sister Pauline was her name. She was a much younger Nun, and that was when I was in St Brigid's ... and I was quite loud ...use to get in trouble. If I knew the answer to something I couldn't wait, and I'd put my hand up and say the answer ...anyway that got me into trouble a little bit. This teacher was fabulous, and she brought the album "Eagle Rock" to school. And she'd say I want you to sing this song ... and I'd sing it .. because I could sing. My younger sister was good at singing as well. This teacher was good ... she brought a lot of musical appreciation out in me. Yeh! I remember listening to Eagle Rock at school when I was in about grade 4 or 5.

We played "Rounders" at school and Red Robin. Rounders was good and Red Robin and we played them in our breaks ... and we played knucklebones ... I was good at knucklebones. I ended up getting the really big ones ... you know you could have the small tiny plastic ones or the really big real ones and I could do all of these amazing things. I could still do it ... probably you know pick up five at once and all of this sort of stuff. My brother use to play marbles. I wasn't all that good at marbles. I couldn't do that trick thing and push with the thumb ... but marbles were quite popular. Hmmm! What else?

Judy: What about lessons and learning?

Karen: At Primary school didn't learn all that much ... learnt a lot about religion. I remember getting to High School and thinking I haven't learn all that much.

Judy: Did you read much?

Karen: We had the Country Lending Service. Mum subscribed to the State Library so every month we would get a big box of books. I guess she picked out books for us and as we got older we would pick our own books. And then of course it stopped. I remember one book in particular called "The Borrowers". I really loved that book.

Judy: A wonderful wonderful book.

Karen: So, yes, we did ... but I wasn't a huge reader because I was always playing sport. I was swimming. For a couple of years I swam in Winter and that did me in ... that was enough for me. But I was pretty good at sport. Swimming was something ... I wanted to be Shane Gould. (laughter). Everybody loved Shane Gould and Karen Moras. We had a really strong club. Mum was, I think, secretary of the club and her and a group of other Mum's put together the Gawler Swimming Club Netball team. (GAS). That happened when ...yes, I was one of the first players from a junior perspective. We used to play for St Joseph's Netball Club and then we went to GAS. It was swimming that consumed a lot of my life. I liked school. I liked learning. I found it really interesting ... I liked math's. I just enjoyed numbers. We didn't do much in Primary School as far as history ... we did a lot of rote learning and it got a bit boring ... I think I was a bit bored. When I got to High School ... back in 72/73 ... something like that ... and there were thirteen Year 8 classes.

Judy: What High School were you at?

Karen: Gawler High. There were thirteen classes, and if you were brainy I guess you got put in the top two classes. I got in one of the top two classes ...102. So I must have learnt something in Primary School. I enjoyed High School.

Judy: What do you remember about High School?

Karen: Well there were lots of kids. There were probably as many kids there now as there were there then ... but it was just High School. I got to meet lots of different people. I loved it. Met many people I still know now. There were many kids that came from different parts of the region ...Two Wells, Virginia, Mallala. Plus Gawler. There were just so many people there. I did French in Year 8 and Year 9 and loved that. I remember we had a French restaurant in Gawler at the time ... do you remember it?

Judy: Yes I do.

Karen: (laughter). And we went as a class ... we went to the restaurant. And I remember eating French food for the first time. I thought it was really exciting loved French. I did history. I had a history teacher ... and she didn't like tattoos. I remember her. It's funny. You know how you remember these weird things (laughter) and she didn't like she said; "Oh tattoos are a form of mutilation". I don't know how she weaved it into a story about the Incas in South America. She made this comment and it has ... stuck. I loved science.

Judy: Do you remember any of your teachers?

Karen: Mrs. Mason was an English teacher in year 11 who was magnificent. She was a fabulous English teacher. I had a fantastic English teacher in year 12 and just can't remember his name. He was stunning. You did things like a WW1 project. Back then you still did research projects and I did WW1. You did your Shakespeare, your different novels .. and I loved every minute of it. It was so interesting. The way he ran the discussion in the class was fantastic. You felt like you weren't being stifled. You could say how you felt and really discuss the novel or the play

It was a really enjoyable year, ..Year 12 for me. Years 8,9, and 10 ... all I did was muck around. I was constantly in trouble (laughter). I couldn't keep my mouth shut. I was always annoying people. I think I was a bit bored. I did have some good teachers and I'm sure they use to pull their hair out .. I was annoying .. I couldn't be quiet.

Judy: I can relate to that. So you had an enjoyable time but a bit boring for some of high school. When did you leave and what happened then?

Karen: I went through to Year 12 and in Year 12 I did Maths 1S ... it was called. Even though I was good at Maths I didn't do Maths1 and 2 and I think from Year 10 through to 12 I became disengaged with school a bit and ..

Judy: Do you know why?

Karen: I think .. my parents were going through a divorce at the time and I think that had a huge impact on my ability to concentrate and so we didn't have any money either. It was quite a difficult time for my mother ... and so ... it was a very difficult time.

Judy: So, you left High School. You got Maths 1S you said.

Karen: Yes. I did Maths 1S, I did Biology, I did Chemistry uhh! ... I couldn't stand my chemistry teacher ... I don't know why ... I just didn't engage. I was struggling during that time. So yes it was quite a difficult time for me. So, anyway I did English and loved my English teacher, loved my Biology teacher, and I also did Classical Studies and .. I shouldn't have done that not good ... and I was particularly disruptive.

Judy: What is Classical Studies?

Karen: Greek and Roman History and I don't know why I picked it but I did. And I shouldn't have gone anywhere near that topic, but I did. I passed but I mucked around and didn't study as well as I should have. But I still loved English and Maths and got through. Finished Year 12 ...yeh ... we had a Year 12 Matric party ... that's right ... they use to be called matric parties ... and I met my husband there ...Terry.

Judy: Ohh! Ok! Was he a student of Gawler High?

Karen: He was. He's a few years older than me. He was introduced by a friend. So yes, I met him and ... anyway ... so left School and the following year I had Natasha. That changed my life a bit and then we ... I was still living at home with Mum. And then Terry and I decided ... well .. he decided we were going to buy a house. So he bought a house and we are still in the same house.

Judy: Goodness!

Karen: Yes I know (chuckles). We are not particularly adventurous. (Laughter) Stayed in the same house. And then I applied and got into Nursing. I had actually applied for Physiotherapy and because I didn't work hard enough I didn't get in ... and I remember going into the Tertiary Admissions Centre, which use to be on North Terrace and yeh! ... I got my slip with my preferences and physio wasn't on there ... and I walked in and said "why haven't I got (chuckles) why haven't I got physiotherapy?". And they said that's because you didn't get a high enough score. Oh! ... it hadn't even occurred to me (laughter). So, I got into Nursing ... I got into a Bachelor of Arts, I got into Nursing at Flinders ... it was the new tertiary course there, and a Bachelor of Arts in Teaching ... and I took teaching, which was a mistake. I started my teaching course at Murray Park Magill. So, travelling there and back and ... hated it. I didn't know what I was doing. I was completely out of my depth. I think I was still recovering from what had happened ... and I pulled out. Later on I had Natasha. Then I applied to do nursing at the Lyell McEwen Hospital and I remember going to have an interview while I was pregnant with Natasha. I had been accepted. And I went down and saw this wonderful woman, Jenny Bowham, who was the Director of Nursing, in fact I only saw her a few weeks ago, and she came up and said hello ... I couldn't believe it .. couldn't believe it .. wonderful ... and she was fabulous. The Head of Medicine Dr Elix was in this room and I'd come to see if I could defer for 12 months. And they let me defer. Yeh. They let me defer for 12 months. And then I started my training when Natasha was 5&1/2 months old, which wasn't easy to do.

Judy: Who looked after her?

Karen: My mum. It was fabulous. So I worked fulltime as a student nurse and Jenny Bowham said, "well you can't be married and work". I remember that ...

Judy: Goodness me.

Karen: Yes. This was in the 80's. She said you can't look after a husband! well she didn't know my husband ... because his mother died when he was young, so he was quite resilient and organized .. and we were quite a team ... and we were living together by that point. We had the house. And ..really .. I went .."ooh!" There were a couple of things said to me. One was "What are you going to do with the baby?" And my comment was .. which wasn't a particularly mature comment ... 'I'm going to put her in the garbage bin, what do you think I'm going to do with her.!' (chuckles) Like .. you know ... what a stupid thing to say. Of course I come out and say these things and thought; "Oh! maybe I shouldn't have said that".

Judy: And what business is it of theirs.

Karen: Well this is the stuff you get as a female .. as a young mum. And it hasn't changed. I'd like to think it has changed but I really do resonate with young Mums ..so

Judy: They took you on?

Karen: Yes. They took me on which they were reluctant to do because I had a baby and ... that was highly unusual. And usually you didn't continue on when you had children. So I worked. I finished. I loved it. I was good at what I did.

Judy: How long did it take to become a trained nurse?

Karen: Three years. And then I did a few months ... oh, and they actually offered me a full-time job. I was one of the few that ... at that point they were hard to come by and they offered me a fulltime job on kids ward. I wasn't able to take that. I thought "No, I need to think about what I want to do." And I then had Chris. We got married in between time. So we got married and then we had Chris. Then I used that training to get part time work. I started working here at the Gawler Hospital. That was mainly night duty and casual work. But it was regular enough just to get my skills up over time. I then had Kimberly while I was still working here, and then was continuing to work mainly night duty .. and then found a job at the Lyell McEwen, permanent part time which was fabulous, 0.5, still shift work. And rosters being as they are they give you five shifts in a row but ... loved it as well. Loved it. Spent 10 years at the Lyell McEwen. Loved the hospital. So continued to work ... eventually becoming 0.7 .. always shift work. Then I was able to get Monday to Friday. I wanted to be able to attend the kids sporting events on weekends and so I worked Monday to Friday. During that time I was offered a position of 3 months at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH). That was seventeen years ago. That was my first step into fulltime work and travel. I took that on and I haven't regretted that move.

Judy: I just want to take you back to your childhood. Talk about special occasions ... Christmas, birthdays, festivals, holidays.

Karen: We didn't have holidays. Mum and Dad worked in a business. We had one holiday which was a driving holiday to Sale. That was it. (laughter). I don't know why. There must have been some reason for going there. It wasn't about us. We didn't have holidays. When you are in a business you don't have a holiday. And when we came to Gawler Mum and Dad took on a Deli as well, which I think Mum never wanted to do. And I use to work in that Deli.

Judy: Where is that?

Karen: Gawler West on Fourteenth St ... It's still there. It's a little flat roofed building. It's not used for anything now. It's a private residence, but .. it was a deli. People in Gawler West would know it really well. So it's on Fourteenth St just before you start going up the hill. I worked there for years as a kid ... and on my own. It was slave labor I think (chuckle) ... never got paid ... loved it. Loved the people that came in. Learnt so much about people ... the orange juice man ... the orange juice lady ... the Gibbs man ... and various other characters that use to come in. I remember one time that it gets back to your question. Because we didn't spend time with our extended family Christmas was going to be Night Mass and then coming back and having Christmas just with our little family. But we didn't have extended family because we had been away for so long. We had reconnected with our extended family, but we didn't quite feel the same because we were used to being with our own group, ... our little family. Work was a constant thing that we did. So I worked in the shop, as we called it, and I use to serve everyone, make milkshakes. I remember a rep came in one day and ... I didn't know what I was doing ... and he wanted me to buy ... I don't know how old I was ... might have been 15 ... I don't know ... and it was Mortein fly spray ... you know, the cans ... and being a deli you would only have one or two ... and he says; "Oh, you need 8" ... well it turned out to be 8 boxes that I signed up for. (laughter) And my Mum hit the roof ... "What am I going to do with these 8 boxes of fly spray!!!!". "Oh! I dunno". I didn't know what I was doing. I thought it was just 8. (laughter). That was a good learning thing. You learn lots of skills when you work in a shop.

Birthdays? I remember my Mum, for my Birthday she made ... I had a doll ... A Tearie Dearie Doll loved this doll ... I think I might still have it ... actually I think I've got it in one of my boxes. She had eyelids that went up and down and you could actually feed her a bottle. Not that I'm into bottle feeding but I thought it was amazing ... you know ... this hole in the mouth ... all this sort of stuff ... and her eyes would water (laughter).

Judy: I had one that you fed with a bottle and it wet itself (laughter).

Karen: So, I had this Tearie Dearie Doll and I loved this doll. Mum was a good knitter and one year she knitted this entire baby set and that was my Birthday present. I still remember it. It was so beautiful. It was cream and pink. And it was all that knitting rather than just pearl. It was a beautiful knitted outfit, and I went; "Wow, doll's clothes, how awesome". So ... I loved it. I remember that. I also remember one time at Christmas she bought me a suitcase (laughter).

Judy: Subtle. (laughter)

Karen: I didn't even know it was mine. One Christmas morning I'm walking around going "Where's my present? And I walked past it three times ... and it wasn't even wrapped up.

And there it was ... " Wow suitcase .. fantastic". We didn't have a lot of money, so we didn't get large grandiose presents, but the presents we did get were really beautiful in their own way.

I remember birthday parties. I used to go to parties in Rushworth. One time I had a Birthday party ..or? ... it was either my Sister's party or mine? ... and I don't think anyone came. I remember this and thinking; "Oh God! no one has come". I remember this and for ever more I've always had a thought; " What if nobody turns up".

Judy: Oh! Dear.

Karen: Yes. I don't know what the problem was. Something wasn't quite right (laughter).

Judy: They weren't still frightened they were going to get Rheumatic Fever?

Karen: Oh, who knows. Well I never did get rheumatic fever. I was lucky so maybe those huge injections did the trick. Yeh. So birthday parties ... we didn't have big birthday parties. Yet with my kids they had lots of birthday parties.

Judy: Did you go to Sunday School?

Karen: No. We were always at Church. We didn't do Sunday School because we went to Catholic School.

Judy: So you had it seven days a week.

Karen: Pretty much. We did the Rosary. We went to Mass. I've always enjoyed Mass ... the ritual around it, the reflection and I still enjoy that. My Mum right up until she became really unwell ... she use to go to Mass every day. Her faith was very much around ... not so much the structure and the rules ... and she challenged them all the time ... but about that Faith, that Spirituality that underpins it. I think that's why I have enjoyed it ... loved it. Yeh I use to read at Mass. I've always sung at Mass ... for a long time. My Mum and Dad were in choirs. She played the organ at Mass ... so she was heavily involved in the organization. So there was always that vocation and role of giving to others. And she was a great example when I worked in the shop ... how she helped people. And Gawler West has never been a rich community but some beautiful long-term relationships and friendships were made from that shop.

Judy: Have you still got some from that time?

Karen: Interestingly ..Yes. There are a couple of people who always knew my Mum and knew me as kids. And we ran the shop. So absolutely. One of them .. she is my age ... and in the recent floods I was having a chat with her ... we were talking about her neighbor who is quite elderly and what she might be able to do to help her ... because she might need some help. And they live in Gawler West and it is subject to flooding. Yes .. so that's part of that shop connection.

Judy: Well we might call it a day because we are focusing on the growing up years and I think you have covered it ... unless you can think of anything.

Karen: One year when Cyclone Tracy ..

Judy: Oh! 1974. Christmas 74.

Karen: Yes. The Darwin Swimming Club came to Gawler ... as Gawler had the Country Swimming Championships. I was one of the senior swimmers. All of us kids swam, and Mum was on the Committee and we billeted the Captain of the team. And they use to win the "Countries" every year ... they were so strong. But that year they only brought a skeleton team. I remember that, and I remember them coming down ... and the previous years they had huge contingents of people ... but that year there was just a handful. And they just stopped coming after that. I remember Cyclone Tracy well ... and swimming in our pool ... I used to have so many good memories swimming up and down that pool .. all the time .. loved it.

Judy: Do you still go?

Karen: I think two seasons ago I started but I couldn't ... I was just too busy. So I am hopeful that I can start swimming again love swimming. Love it. But I'm finding as I age that I just can't swim as fast as I used to .. (laughter). It's a great memory ... that pool.

Judy: Has it changed much?

Karen: It hasn't changed. There have certainly been some improvements. It's still beautiful outdoors. You look up and you see the gum trees. We have gorgeous weather and it's a great experience to just be getting in and doing a few laps. I know that pool like the back of my hand.

Judy: What about the rest of Gawler. Has that changed much since you played as a kid?

Karen: Well Gawler East certainly has. I knew every street. I walked to school and then I caught the bus to school. So I knew the bus routes. It has, but it hasn't. There are certainly more people here. And you don't notice the change so much do you but the character of Gawler I don't think has changed. We've still got long term locals here. People who love the community of Gawler. We were so heavily involved in the Catholic side of Gawler which is often not talked about. There are old family friends that spent a lot of time at our house and they still live in Gawler. In fact there are people I babysat. I used to babysit! There are people who probably don't even know that I did babysit them. Some of them do. I wasn't a particularly good baby sitter. (laughter).

Judy: This is when you were at High School?

Karen: Yes. Family and friends. Use to get a few dollars. It was a good way of getting a bit of pocket money. I remember learning to drive. A guy by the name of Bob Connelly ... people might know him ... he taught me to drive.

Judy: How old were you?

Karen: As soon as I turned 16 I got my license. I couldn't wait. Mum had no money. She had a cream Ford. We used to call it the tank. You know ... one of those old cars with a column shift. And, of course, Mum being 5' 1" she could barely see over this massive car, and I learnt to drive in that car ... and I just couldn't wait. I thought; "I've got to be independent".

And I didn't tell you that I played Lacrosse as well. I was recruited through Gawler High. There was a teacher called Jan Harris and she was the coach of the East Torrens Women's Lacrosse Team. She recruited a few promising young females and so I use to travel down to the South Parklands where we played Lacrosse. There were two or three of us that went down. That was a lot of fun too.

Judy: So your life was very sport oriented ... very much so ...that was your social life as an adolescent?

Karen: Yes. I went to a lot of music concerts. I didn't mention that either. I went to Sherbet, Skyhooks, Air Supply, Dragon ..(laughter). My first ever album ... every bit of money I got I bought an album my first album was "Wish You Were Here" by Pink Floyd. I was a huge Rod Stewart fan of course, and the Eagles. I went and saw them. I saw the Doobie Brothers. So many .. Oh! Dr Hook ... that was terrible. It was at Hindmarsh stadium and was awful (laughter).

And we use to play lacrosse and then go to a concert after that. I think I was only 16 or 17.

Judy: What about the theatre or pictures?

Karen: Mum took us to live performances all the time when we were kids. She would take us down to the Festival Theatre. Oh! (laughter) I remember she took us to a movie. It was supposed to be "Fiddler on the Roof" for my birthday at the Elizabeth Drive Inn. Turned out to be Clockwork Orange and we weren't allowed in. Huh! (laughter). She got it wrong and we were sitting in the car and she was going "Oh God" ..you know. She had thought "Let's go out and see a movie" and it just didn't work out ... but we did and do laugh about that. I remember that when I was training in nursing that the Rocky Horror Picture Show use to be on at the Chelsea Picture Theatre every Friday night. And there were a few people going down and they said, "you have got to get dressed up" and I thought I'm not doing all that ... so I didn't go and I missed it. So all that time I never went to the Rocky Horror Picture Show at the Chelsea. Just after I had Natasha we went down to the Elizabeth Cinema and watched the first Star Wars movie. And ..uh! ... I think because I had kids we didn't just go out and see the movies. I was either working ... when Kimberly was born I started playing netball during the day and on weekends. I got back into sport. So it just didn't ...

Judy: You had a radio when you were young?

Karen: We had TV. When we were in the hotel in Victoria we use to watch "The Magic Roundabout" ... I think it was called ah! ... "The Magic Circle" ... that's what it was called. It was an Australian program. That was a program we watched. Because we could only watch TV for so much time and the rest of the time we were outside. We watched Looney Tunes on Saturday mornings. Use to watch a lot of cartoons. And then the usual TV stuff at night. I .. guess we watched a lot of TV. Now I hardly watch any TV.

Judy: You wouldn't be home.

Karen: I don't miss it. But, yes, lots of TV ... "Lost in Space" all that sort of stuff. Use to love watching some of those shows. So TV more than movies I think. I'll probably think of some movies, but none come to mind ... apart from the first one after Natasha was born.

Mum took us down to live shows at the Festival Theatre.

Judy: Can you remember any?

Karen: There was a South African show that came, and every second word was the "f word". Ans she took me down ... and it was at the Festival Theatre. It was two guys and it was very political. That's what I remember ... can't remember what it was called. It was very good. I saw Marcel Marceau.

Judy: Yes I saw him too.

Karen: Saw that. And Oedipus Rex when I was in Year 12. I drove down with a few girls. It was part of our Classical Studies we had to watch at the Festival Theatre. I got lost. We got there at half time. I don't know how I got lost (laughter) but I was driving down and ended up in the Hills and came back down maybe it was deliberate?!! ... I don't know. But I remember the huge Oedipus Rex .. because they were on stilts.

Judy: That's right. I do remember that production.

Karen: So we use to see a lot of live productions rather than movies. I think that's probably ... so I've always had a love of live theatre and live music. And that was Mum ... she use to take us ... she'd say: "Let's go and see this". Yeh. Yeh. I remember that.

Judy: Well thank you for that. I think we will wind it up. I think someone has a lot to transcribe.

Karen: Thank you for that. You are very good.
