SUMMARY TO TAPED INTERVIEW

"William Williamson, concerning his life between 1930 and 1950 in Greta"

History

Open Foundation 1988

Thursday 10am - 12pm.
He was born William Clarence Williamson at seventeen Riley Street, Greta on the 6th of August, 1922. His mother gave birth to him in the home as she did with her six other children. There was no doctor present, only the midwife, Nurse Hinton. As a child, Willy never understood why Nurse Hinton ran around in a fluster, desperate for boiling water, until he heard the first cry of a new baby. To him, that cry was the first time he knew there was to be a new addition to his family.

The family home was modestly constructed with any and pieces which could be found. Although, it was mostly made of weatherboards and timber from the bush. Willy remembers where the money came from for the lining of the house: he and his sister had saved thirty shillings by collecting and selling bottles and bones, to buy a horse. One day, Willy and his sister came home, only to find their money had been taken by their father to pay for the lining of their home.

They were a self-sufficient family, growing everythning they needed for food. Meals were cooked on an open fire and to use the oven the open fire was pushed under the oven. Willy boasts that his mother's cake was beautiful and she was the best cook in Greta.

Toys were not abundant. Willy does remember his first bicycle and when he was eight years old, he and his uncle Johnny would fossick around the rubbish tips, finally collecting enough parts to build his first push bike. It was not shinny and new and it had numerous rust holes, but he was very proud of it.

The financial crash of 1929 in America impacted on the Australian economy, leading to high unemployment and the Depression. The mining industry in the Hunter Valley was to suffer. Willy remembers the Rothbury kickoff and the death of Norman Brown who died of wounds received from a ricocheting bullet, in December, 1929. He has vivid recollections of explosions on the mines, resulting in huge flames shooting hundreds of feet into
the sky and the loss of life of men and horses. It seems that these times did not allow a young boy to remain young.

Willy left school at fifteen after spending four years in sixth grade: there was not enough money to send him to high school. As a young man of fourteen, his first job was to work as assistant to the milkman, where he helped milk cows and deliver the milk twice a day.

When World War II broke out, Willy was seventeen. He had been working in protected industries such as Newbold's brickyards and the Civil Construction Corp as a labourer. At one stage he worked as a cook for the Civil Construction Corp. After obtaining permission from Frank Compston, his employer, to leave the Civil Construction Corp, he and a friend joined the airforce. In the airforce, Willy helped in construction work in places such as Wagga, Kapooka, Darwin, Melbourne, Mount Isa and Borneo. He returned to Australia in 1945, married in 1946 and returned to Greta in 1947 with his wife and son.

On returning to Greta, Willy remembers the Greta army camp as being used as an Italian prisoner of war camp. It was not until 1949 that the camp was converted to a migrant camp. He recalls there were a number of migrant periods but also feels that those who attempted to mix with the Greta community coped better with their new life in Australia. When the camp closed in 1958 many migrants made their homes in the Greta township. Today, Willy has many good friends of different nationalities.

William Williamson is still living in Greta with his wife. His three children have all married and have families of their own. He believes that his life has contained many varying experiences, both good and bad and that those experiences shaped his life. When asked if he could change anything, William Williamson stated “I'd like to know as much now and be forty years younger.”

“Greta's Great” School Centenary Publication, “The Lockout”

There have been conflicting stories about this incident.
OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY: THURSDAY 10-12.

MARGARET HENRY

RESEARCH PROJECT: TERM 3

TOPIC: Greta Migrant Camp

1949 - 1958

Julie Kay
The post-war immigration program allowed over one hundred and seventy thousand displaced persons of varying nationalities to emigrate to Australia. Greta army camp was one of the many institutions used as a refuge for thousands of refugees and displaced people from war-ravaged Europe. The task of beginning a new life in a new country was made difficult by the language problems, the loss of cultural identity, the harsh foreign climate, separation from families and financial difficulties. For many migrants, Greta camp was to be their home for many years. Not only was this home the nucleus of many hardships and heartache, it was also the birthplace of new opportunities, self-discovery and many long lasting friendships.

Prior to being used as a migrant shelter, Greta army camp was used as an Italian prisoner of war camp. It was not until 1949 that it was converted into a camp by the government to temporarily house newly arriving migrants. The camp was a refuge to migrants in excess of ten thousand from countries such as Greece, Italy, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia and many others, until it closed in 1968.

The camp consisted of three sections, each given nicknames by the migrants. There was Silver City, where ex-army tin huts were situated and hence gave a silver appearance to that section of the camp. Next to Silver City was Chocolate City where weatherboard huts were situated, coated with oil. Then, there was Siberia which was separate from and was located a reasonable distance from Silver City and Chocolate City.

The camp functioned independently from the township of Greta. It contained facilities such as a fifty bed hospital, a police station, a school, a kitchen and a canteen. There were also transport and administration offices. Opposite the camp on the 'Old Camp' Road were two stores where food and second hand

4. Caption on photographs, viewed at Local History Section in Regional Library.
clothing could be bought.

On arrival in the camp, many migrants considered the
uninviting tin and wooden huts a depressing sight. They were
welcomed by a supervisor who would direct them to the block they
were to accommodate. The huts were partitioned into approximately
ten rooms by a thin wall or wardrobes and blankets. These
slimy partitions did little to improve privacy. Arguments, crying
children, violent love-making, every conversation: they were all
amplified under the iron roof.

Unnecessary hardships were encountered in camp life due to the
low standard and overcrowding of accommodation. Survival in
war-time Europe had proven to be good training for improvisation
and ingenuity. For example: old material dropped on a surface
substituted for a lounge chair, and kerosene and four gallon
drums could be made into a stove.

In contrast with their traditional foods, the Australian
diet was considered bland: mutton being the main ingredient
for most meals. Although food was plentiful and reasonably
nutritious, there was dissatisfaction with camp food. Often
rabbits and native birds were caught in an attempt to vary
or improve the existing diet. There were some new taste sensations
such as golden syrup, peanut butter, corn flakes and Devon.

There were times when the attitudes of camp directors
were less than friendly. One migrant lady remembers being
told: "You were brought here not for your brains, but for
your muscle." More often than not, complaints of problems
such as unappetizing food and the lack of heating in the
barracks went ignored.

The migrant residents of Greta camp found the winters
to be cold and harsh. Many of the old army barracks were
declared fire hazards and therefore heating was forbidden. Because
of the bitter cold, the migrants would often defy the supervisors
and use heaters. Consequently, camp police would patrol the camp
and confiscate any heaters found. It was not uncommon for

5. Panich, Sanctuary: p 55
7. Leary, Silver City: 1964
blackouts to occur due to the overloading of generators from the use of unauthorized appliances. Of course, the camp director had heating in his home and it is not surprising that this was resented by many cold migrant families.

Hot, steamy summers were also an element of Australian life with which most migrants were unfamiliar. A past resident of Greta camp remembers a time when her husband and small daughter went fishing along the Hunter River. They had migrated from Czechoslovakia and did not realize the severity of the sun. Her daughter received third degree burns and spent three weeks in hospital. Many babies were reported to suffer heat exhaustion and dehydration because their mothers would dress them in warm clothing even in summer.

Women and children were the main occupants of Greta camp as most men were employed on places such as the Hunter Valley wine fields, the western areas of New South Wales and even as far north as Queensland. The men were known to be away for up to three years at a time. Migrant workers brought to Greta were considered more valuable if they were farmers or brick and tile makers. The women found employment as servants and cleaners or in factories. The remaining women in the camp were paid to look after the children of the working women.

The education of children and adults took place in the camp: the language problem being the main area of concentration. There was also some instruction on surf life-saving methods and the meanings of flags. The Girl Guide organization in the camp was a favourite amongst the young girls. Boys tended to play in the surrounding areas of the camp and were quite often found in dangerous situations. In the camps recently vacated by the army, such as Greta... children came upon

9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
casually discarded weaponry such as grenades and bullets.”

Entertainment was organized by the migrants, themselves. Folk dancing at Greta was a common pastime and there were many times of happiness, when they would congregate together and play their traditional instruments such as the garda. The young people from Greta and surrounding towns were frequent visitors to the dances organized by the migrant community at the vacated army supply depot.

The migrant experience in Greta was a unique one. This distinct community was almost a self-contained entity, separate from the nearby township of Greta, yet somehow part of it. It was neither European nor Australian in character, representing a period of cultural change. At a recent reunion an immigrant from Holland expressed the feelings of many:

““There were difficult years of adjustment: no other family life; a new language; a loss of social identity; the heat; the financial difficulties.

And yet despite these, there were also a lot of plusses: peace, sunshine, space, freedom, opportunity, natural beauty, prosperity, self-discovery, and satisfaction.”

For the immigrants it was the beginning of Australian life. For Australia it was the transformation into a multicultural society.

12. Panick, Sanctuary... p 74
13. Caption on photographs from Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, viewed at local History Section in Regional Library, Newcastle.
Garda: a Macedonian instrument made of goat skin, similar to the bagpipe.
14. Panick, Sanctuary... p 190
Bibliography:


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Leary, K. Silver City, A Place of Fear but also hope.

Newcastle Morning Herald, 16th March, 1981
Newcastle Herald, 28th May, 1988

Others:
Greta's Great, School Centenary publication, booklet.
History As It Happened, Sydney Morning Herald, 150 years of news and pictures from our oldest newspaper.
Interview with William Williamson of Greta, August 1988, Tape and transcript available.
Interview with Mrs P. Rumel of Greta, September 1989.
Photographs from Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Viewed at Local History Section in Regional Library.
Julie Kay.

Open Foundation: History: Thursday.

Transcript for interview with:

"William Williamson concerning his life between 1930 and 1950 in Greta."

Lecturer: Margaret Henry.
Interview with William Williamson (WW) by Julie Kay (J.K.)

My name is Julie Kay. It is Friday, 26th August. I grew up with my family in the small Upper Hunter township of Greta as did my father and his family. I am about to talk to my Dad, William Williamson on his memories of his younger days in Greta.

Q. Where were you born, Dad?
A. When was I born!

Q. Where and When?
A. When, I was born in Filey Street, Greta.

Q. In the house?
A. In the house. The 6th August, 1922.

Q. 1922! And was that um, Ma didn't go to the hospital at all then.
A. No, No.

Q. She stayed in the house!
A. No she had them in the house.

Q. And where did Ma and Poppy come from? Did they grow up in Greta? (Ma and Poppy are WW's parents) Or did they come from somewhere else?
A. Mum was from Sawyers Gully. Born at Sawyers Gully between Greta and Kurri.

Q. And Poppy?
A. Poppy was born in Newcastle, Adamstown.

Q. I didn't realize that! And how many brothers and sisters did you have?
A. Four sisters. Pearly, Dolly (repeats), Zilla and Phyllis.
Q. And brothers?
A. Three, Leslie, Albert and myself.

Q. Did Ma have any stillbirths that you know of?
A. I think I know of two.

Q. We'll go into your childhood. When you were young, what was the house made of?
A. It was made of anything at all they could pick up, I think. Practically nothing. Hardly weatherboards. Slopey weatherboards. A lot of them were cut out of the boat, back yard mills and things like that.

Q. And you mentioned the hotel, one of the old pubs.
A. We got a lot of the living out of one of the old pubs. That's where my father got a lot of the living out of one of the old pubs that was pulled down. That was back in the Depression, in the early thirties when he bought the living out of the bottom hotel that they pulled down. He bought the living boards out of that.

Q. And where did he get the money from?
A. That's a rare point. The money part about that. My sister and I were saving up to buy a house. We'd been gathering bottles, boxes and things like that, that we used to gather, to get the money. That was good money then days. We used to get three pence a bag for bones.

Q. What sort of bones?
A. Just ordinary bones. Follow a cow around till it dropped dead.

Q. And what did they do with the bones?
A. Well, I suppose they used to go to the glue factories to make glue and things like that with the bones. Buttons and everything like that.

Q. So it was good money for collecting bones?
A. Three pence a bag, yes, for bones. Sixpence a dozen for
Q. And how much did you say you had saved?
A. We had thirty bob.

Q. Thirty. And it got spent on the lining for the house?
A. I'll get spent on the lining for the house. We were a bit cranky for a while. (J.K. laughs) We never got our horse.

Q. I can imagine you didn't. And the did she have a garden? Did you eat what was grown on the garden?
A. We had a big garden, a good garden. We grew everything that we needed, really, as far a vegetables go and fruit go. We had three blocks of land and two blocks were under garden and fruit trees. We had plenty to eat as far as vegetable go.

Q. Any of those fruit trees still there now?
A. Those fruit trees - they're still, yeah, there; still mandarin trees there, there's still one of the peach trees still there, yes.

Q. And the types of meals then. She cooked all her own, I gather of course?
A. Cooked all her own, on an open fire.

Q. On an open fire!
A. Yes, it was an open fire with a oven along side of it. You stoked the open fire, when you wanted to use the oven, you put the fire under the oven.

Q. Did the cakes turn out?
A. Yep! Beautiful (J.K. laughs) Beautiful, she was the best cook in town, that's why we lived so well.

Q. And what about, as far as I've having the children: when the children were born. I gather that they were all born in the house.
A. All born in the house, yes, the only one that might not have been was Zilla (as a result of more discussion, w.w. remembered she was born in the house).

Q. The youngest! And the doctor, did he ever come? Did he ever need to come.
A. No, there use to be a mid wife: Nurse thinner use to be her name and she use to come and I could never understand why she was coming there. No! Until the baby started yellin' or howlin’ (J.K. laughs) There'd be a hell of a ruck around the house this particular night and this woman runnin' around in white and the kettle would be on the fire, they'd be churn' boilin' water in and out. An' I use to be there - what the hello gain' on? (J.K. laughs) Next minute you'd hear this howl, then there was another one.

Q. And they kept coming?
A. They kept on comin'.

Q. And as far as when baby's were born were you visited by relatives? Did they have a get together or did anyone come and visit?
A. These days, we were...it was all...actually in them days, the whole town was made up of, they reckoned, of Hodges and Logos... and there was a lot of Logos. The whole street was Logos in one part. (Logos was W. W. mother's maiden name)

Q. And when you were little, what sort of toys did you have? What did you play with?
A. Toys!

Q. Were you given particular things or did you make your own?
A. Oh, I don't know that we had much to go on...the only thing I can remember was a little wooden trun...set I had, you to pull around on a string. Had no motor though!

Q. I can remember you telling me about a push bike that you had made out of stout rivulets. Can you tell me about that?
A. Ah! That was me Uncle Jimmy got that for me (Uncle Jimmy Lodge). We use to go around the rubbish tips and all round the rubbish tips, he decided he'd build me a bike. He was about fourteen and I was only so high.

Q. What, fourteen and you were about seven or eight?
A. I'd be about seven or eight. Yes. Jimmy's about seventy-five, six now. So that'd be right. He'd be round about fifteen at the time an' he use to, we use to go around in an old horse and cart and um, I can still remember it, they use to call the old horse Paddy. He was as poor as a crow. He use to get around the rubbish tips gatherin' up all the rubbish around the tips. So we went onto this old bike frame this particular day at Branston. That was Branston rubbish tip, it was, and um, it had a big hole rusted on the front of it, in the headpiece. And um, no any how we put that together and got parts from other rubbish tips an' a couple of old tyres and put two tyres on the one wheel so as the holes wouldn't match up - things like that. (J.K. laughs) And um, that was me first bike.

Q. And how long did you have that for?
A. They use to chid me everywhere I went on it because they reckon the white ants were rustit. There was holes, rust holes, into it. (K. laughs) Oh, I had that for quite some time (pause) till I got a job.

Q. And what was your first job?
A. I started working for me Uncle, first.

Q. Was that a job as a child?
A. As a child, that was, that was a job after school. I use to have to go, yeah, after school, back in the early thirties when he started a dairy farm out Tuckers Lane. (And um, I use to go out there after school and get the cows in for him and have the cows in the yard for him and everything. It was all scrub country and he was workin' on relief work in the stone quarry out Tuckers Lane and he'd knock off a few o'clock in...
the afternoon and I'd have the cows there ready for him when he came in and then we'd milk them then. And separate and feed the calves and everything like that. Well he use to pay me that was seven days a week, I use to go out with him. Well he use to pay me five bob a week, them days, for that.

Q. And what time did you manage to get home? How long did it take you to do that?
A. We'd get home anytime from dark, around dark. Six o'clock.

Q. So, it took you a couple of hours for five bob a week?
A. Yes, I'd leave at three o'clock. Yeah, it'd be six-seventy six sometimes. In the summer time it'd be later because we'd stop there then till it got dark and plough and things like that.

Q. When your saying the early thirties, your looking at the Depression. What can you remember about that? As far as the mines, the lock out?
A. That was back in twenty-nine. That was when the big trouble was Rothbury. I can remember the Rothbury days. I'd only be round about, I wouldn't be no more than seven year old then, and I can remember going over the railway bridge at the railway station cause that's where all the mines and all the trouble was out there. That's the way they used to go, over the railway bridge on up through the bush and straight out to Rothbury. And their only conveyance was horse and cart or horse and sulky or they'd walk or others would ride bikes. That's all. Well we used to sit on that bridge and I can always remember that when Norman Brown got shot and uh, then then we'd go over there and that was the cry: "Who got killed today, mister. Anyone got shot today, mister.?” (J.R. laughs)

That was back in the twenty-nines, yeah.

Q. And as far as the fire. You said, you'd mentioned before there was a fire.
A. That was later, yes, that was later, when she fixed.
Q. Was anyone killed in that?
A. Not in the fire as I remember but they tell me years before that in a big one over in the same area.

Q. Was that Anvil Creek?
A. That was where the horses and the men and as far as I know they're still down there today. The horses and men are still there in that pit today. Never been retrieved, never got them out. Never ever got em out. They sealed it up, as far as I know. But the nails never came until around about, oh, I can remember when they went through, we were saw standin' up on the front veranda and watchin' the flames comin' out of the fall-in, it wasn't very deep the seam, there. And um, the blow must have been combustion underneath when it blew and fired and all the fall in just collapsed into the ground, and as it collapsed, it took whole trees, full-size big gum trees that had been there for fifty, sixty years and they just went down into the hole with them.

Q. Poked into the ground.
A. With just the top stickin' out. Then the flames, you'd see the flames shootin' in the air out of that, ow, they'd be in the air a hundred feet, shootin' up in the air. Oh, that's the same time as the old Pong Pit, she went at the same time. Where I use to have, you remember as a kid, I used to have the pig yard. (J.K. says: Yes, yeah, over there) Well, that was the old Pong pit, there.

Q. Pong Pit?
A. Pong! Pong! They called it the Pong. That was the slang name for it. The Pong, P.O.W.O.G. (Spelt out).

Q. I gather it didn't have a very nice odour.
A. No, it didn't, that's right. Anyhow, that where the fire, she blew back out a that tunnel and ignited everything there and burnt all pit top down and everything down there and that was the finish of that pit. In fact, that pit all on that side of the line (train line)
never ever opened again after that fire when she went through it. They sealed it all up, everything sealed up, now. Even still today, it still breaks out, even now and again; it breaks out, now. But your mines rescue and likes that now, they're quick on the scene to fill back in again.

Q. What, where that well is, did that have anything to do with it? Near that pig pen.
A. That was just a water storage, that.

Q. As far as when were young. Can you remember what sort of industries were around? Was it mainly just mining?
A. Oh, industries!

Q. Yeah. Or was there anything else that was around the town? Was it only mining? Were there any other farms that were productive?
A. Oh, there was lots of farms about, but mainly family farms round the Hunter River, likes of that. But other than industry, Gould, the only industry I can ever remember been at. Great was Gibson's Cordial Factory. A one man show. (J.K. says: Oh yes) (W.W. laughs)

Q. That was up the top of Sale Street, wasn't it?
A. That's right, up the back of the house, they used to live.
(J.K. says: I remember that) He use to get around, he always got around, he took his cordials all around in an old flat top Ford truck, with hard wheels on it. Never had air in em, just hard rubber wheels. Yeah.

Q. And what happened to it? Do you know?
A. Oh, I wouldn't have a clue what happened to it, but he had that for years, that one. Yeah.

Q. 'Cause, I mean there's no cordial factory there now. Is there?
A. We use to call him 'mullet mouth'!
Q. Why? (J.K. laughs).
A. Well, he was that tight, he wouldn't give you nothin'. (J.K. laughs).

Q. In other words, you got your change and that was that!
A. Mmm.

Q. And the transport. Can you remember who had the first car?
A. Do you remember who had the first car in Gretna?
A. Thad sella that I'm talking about. I think he might have been one of the first cars around there, that he had.

Q. The fellow that owned Gibbons?
A. Yes, yeah, old Reg Gibson. Now, don't say it was the first car, but one of the first. Then there was Ol', then there was what a name too, they had cars. There wasn't very many cars around then, you know. There was only, there was only the paper shop. Blacksnake McKinnon. We use to call him blacksnaile.

Q. Why?
A. I don't know where he got that name from. He was a bit dark, and they always said he was a snake. (J.K. laughs). So I don't know, and then the other one across the road, he had the paper. There was to be three of them had papers. Newcastle Morning Herald was blacksnake McKinnon. Opposite then was the Telegraph, that was the fruit shop over the road. Ah, and ah that was Campbell's, no Harpers had that. Harpers (J.K. says Harpers! Yes) Harpers. (J.K. says I remember them). Oh and um, then there was horrible Tom, we call him.

Q. Horrible Tom?
A. Horrible Tom Arthur!

Q. Why was that?
A. Old just horrible Tom Arthur. Then down the next fruit shop, just a couple of doors down had the other paper, which was Campbells. We called him Eggypump Campbell. I don't know, don't ask me why Eggypump Campbells, that was. So that was three papers. We had...
three paper shops in town them days.

Q. Gee, I wonder who bought these names about! Eggbyum!!
A. I don't know, I suppose. I don't know.

Q. And other than those few cars, was it just horse and cart?
A. Horse and sulkies, yes. Buggies. My Grandmother, Grandfather, they had a big, elaborate Buggy. You used to go to town every Monday in it, to Maitland, in the horse and buggy. And old Paddy was there again. Use to drag the buggy down. That was the first time I ever went to Maitland. I went to Maitland in the buggy. And ah, I can remember goin' to Maitland and goin' across the long bridge at Maitland, them days. That was the first long bridge. That they called the long bridge behind the hospital, and it was a big old timber construction bridge, them days. Either go along the top of it or you could go along the bottom of it, and it took up two hours to get to Maitland. Twelve miles. (JK says: two hours!). Two hours to get to Maitland in the buggy. I use to sit on this little seat in the front of the buggy. (JK: laughs, picturing a scrawny little boy sitting on the front of a buggy.

Q. And as far as getting onto your schooling. How old were you when you went to school? Do you remember?
A. I went to school pretty early. It'd be pretty early I went to school. Cause I went through school and yeah, it'd have to be early. I'd be no more than four when I went to school. I couldn't a' been because when I finished in sixth class and uh, I was only ten. Then, I stopped in sixth class for four years.

Q. Why?
A. Why! Well they couldn't afford to send you to high school them days. (JK says: Good gracious). I stopped there for four years in sixth class.

Q. And you wrote mainly on the slate boards? Were there slate boards then?
A. Yeah, yeah! It was mainly a lot of slate and uh yeah there
was slate boards. No, you only wrote on slate boards in the early years, like in first class and that, and then I can remember once you got to a bit older it was pretty dangerous for the school teacher because they use to have these little desks. Fat two at it. And you put in there and they had the ink wells let into the desk (W.W. tops the table with his fingers showing how the ink well were positioned in the desks). And yet was ordinary old pens and you dipped them into the ink well. And those ink wells use to fly full of ink, many a day. The kids 'd get them or land 'em at someone if they didn't like. Next thing an ink well 'd come over at ya. Ink everywhere.

Q. I gather the cane came out for that?
A. Then the cane came out and you got the cane them days.
   (J.K. says: I can imagine).

Q. And how big was the school? Was it as big as it is now or was it a lot smaller?
A. Oh, (J.K. says: Greta Public School) No, uh, them days, I would say it was bigger them days. (J.K. says: bigger!!) Ahm, because them days we had six classes, uh, and a different room for each class. Second class use to be off on its own, them days. And uh, the school masters house, use to be along side of the school in the same grounds.

Q. It wasn't always opposite, like I knew it to be.
A. No, it use to be in the grounds, there. There use to be the school masters house there and then you had the five classes in the main buildin' and second class use to be always in a class on its own. Different buildin', and then at the back you had another big buildin' down there, it was the manual room. Manual work, woodwork and all likes of that you use to do. Oh no, I think it was bigger them days. Where today, I think they have two classes in the one room. (J.K. says: But that's in a lot of schools now, unfortunately. They didn't them days. No, No.)
Q. And churches, were there any churches in Gaeta?
A. Oh, churches. Yes we had to go to church, them days. Sunday School mainly, always had to go to Sunday School till you get up to the age, I think, I must have been fourteen when I reneged and said I ain't goin' no more (JK laughs) that's it. Finished (JK says: That was enough, was it?) No, there was quite a few churches. Oh yes there was a few churches.

Q. Are any standing now? Do you know? They're not are they?
A. Yes, you've still got the Catholic church. (JK says: the Catholic one we do) Yes, it's still there and you've got 'Church of England'.

Q. Was that there when you were little? That little Church of England Church?
A. No the big church. The old Church of England still there down by the Whitburn Dam. (Pause) (JK says: I can't place it) then there used to be the Presbyterian Church, alongside of the school, the Public School. There was a Presbyterian Church there.

Q. Was that a brick place? Was it?
A. Yes, yeah, an old brick place. That's right. (JK says: In that span block) Yeah, that's right.

Q. Near the school side of the creek.
A. Yeah, down towards the main street. Yeah. 14m.

Q. I think I remember that!
A. Presbyterian, Salvation Army, More or less. Yeah, they were about the only churches there. There was only the three.

Q. And as far as, we'll get into when you were a young adult. What was your first paying job as an adult? Other than your odd jobs.
A. Oh, what do you call adult? Adult, fourteen? (JK says: Yes, fourteen) Well I started workin' then and that's right. I got a job when I was fourteen or working for Bert Morgan, on
the milk cart. Well um, my job then days, it was um, it was pretty hectic too there. I was only fourteen but old Bert use to reckon the I wasn't as high as the can I was carrying around (JK laughs) I use to have to carry a two gallon can around, round parts of the town to perde the milk. Them days you just served it in a jug. JK says: So you'd milk the cow and then you took it. you milked the cow, you'd get up of a morning. Oh, by this time I'd finally get me pony (JK laughs). Anyhow, I beg the pony and I had the pony. Well I use to ride the pony to work then, bareback, over to work, over to the river at Bett Morgan. Which is about oh be in round about two mile. Well I use to leave home, I use to leave home round about four half past three, four o'clock in the morning, to go to work and uh I'd get over there and get the cows in and milk again then. You'd finish milkin' roughly around about seven o'clock in the morning or half past six. You'd load up them up I use to go with old Bert on the cart, well he'd drop me off at certain points with the two gallon can and the measure and I'd go that way and carry it and he'd go the other way in the horse and cart. Then used to do the run, we'd get home roughly round about nine o'clock from the run of a morning and we'd um, do the washin' up, the cans, the milk cart, and everything like that. Then by the time we finished that, it'd be time to get the cows in again. Milk em again. Cause you run the milk around the town twice a day then days (JK says: Oh, right). Twice a day, seven days a week. I use to get Sunday afternoons off. When I finished the milk run on Sunday evening.

Q. OK! Tell me your wage?
A. Oh, I was getting good money then. Yeah, I was gettin' good money then. I was, we use to do about, I think we use to work around about fifteen hours a day, them days. But I was gettin' ten bob a week then and the keep.

Q. And your keep?
A. Yeah!
Q. Well, that's not bad is it?
A. That was good, yes! Yeah, I was a millionaire!! (SK laughs and says: I can imagine).

Q. So, what, you were fourteen then. How old were you when World War II started?
A. (Pause) Oh, let me think! Thirty-nine, I'd be just on seventeen.

Q. Seventeen. And did you go in the army straight away? Or Airforce.
A. No. No. In that meantime, I had various jobs from then on. I went for the big money then. I went to uh, Newcastle. Yeah, I went to Newcastle to work down at the brick yards. Down at the Brick yards, then, for a while. We use to catch the, there was no traveling in no cars. We use to get on the Bloomfield miners bus. It use to leave home (repeats) something like about half past five of a mornin'. We'd get the bus to Maitland, get the train from Maitland to Newcastle. And then walk down to, to uh, the brick yards, Newboldo. And um, then we did the same thing comin' home of a night time, we'd get the train and then the bus back home. We'd get home roughly round about twenty to seven at night. But that was all right. As a kid, as a kid them days, I was gettin' around three pounds a week. But, it had its faults. Once you turned twenty-one they sacked ya!

A. Cost too much. Yes, they had to pay you full wages then, adult wages. Those days, once you turned twenty one, in all them lots of factories, you went. (SK says: And that would have made it difficult.

Q. As far as when the war did start, how long till you did join up?
A. Oh, let me think.

Q. You were seventeen you said.
A. Yes, I was seventeen, an' I left down there. Left Newboldo. An' I came up and got a job (pause). No I didn't, that's right. I left Newboldo, then got called up for the army.
Q. Oh, you got called up?
A. Called up for the army. So anyhow I packed me bags. Sold me pony.

Q. Sold your pony. Did you get much money for that?
A. No. I got five pounds for him. And uh, Mum packed me bag and away I tailed off to the railway station.

Q. Did many other of the young boys get called up there in the town?
A. Yeah, quite a few of them, that went over there, that day with me. But I got over there, when I got over there though, the Sergeant came along and he ticked everyone off on the, on the list. "What's your name, Son?" he said. I told him who I was. He said "Well, I don't know about you." he said "your names down here but it's been scratched out." I said OK, then you don't want me, hooray. So I went home. So I went home and um, that's right, I was working with the C.C.C. I got a job with the C.C.C. Civil Construction Corps. They built the army camps at Greka and that mob. That was the C.C.C. Worked for Frank Compton.

Q. So the army camp was being built then, was it?
A. Armies were built. Yes it was built then. It was built then. Well they were still building it. I worked for Frank Compton, I roamed around with Frank and we went up to uh, Workweek, Singleton area and Broke, Jerrys Plains and all them places, pullin' in air fields. Air strips. I was workin' with the builders them days. I used to do the, that's where I learnt me cookin'.

Q. That's why you a better cook than Mum! (JK laughs)
A. I used to do the cookin'. They wanted a cook. (Repeats) We were camped out at Jerrys Plains in the bush, Workweek and them places and they wanted a cook. I was only a bit of a kid. So I thought I don't like that pick and shovel. I'd been on it every day and aw in the heat in the summer time, it was that bloody hot. And I thought anything to get off that pick and shovel. 'Cause there was no sick thing as diggers. You was the digger.
And uh, so anyhow they said alright then, we're lookin' for a cook. And there was about twelve blokes there. Well, I only had to cook for twelve blokes. So that's what I ended up doin' up there. Went into the cook house, started doin' their cookin'. Cause that's what we were buildin': cookhouses on uh the building, latrines and like that on the site. So I went into the cook house up there and done the cookin'. Took a dozen rabbit traps with me and like a that an uh, we lived pretty well, mainly on rabbit I could cook em through.

Q. I know, I grew up on them too! (JK laughs)
A. Yeah, that was up there.

Q. Do you went into the war them. Did they got it all fixed up, the bit about your name being scratched out?
A. No, well see, they had me down, and how it come to be there it was a protected industry. The last report on me when I left the brickyards it was a protected industry. (JK says: Oh, I see that how they had me out (JK says: that'show they scratched you out) I went into another protected industry straight away, straight into the CCC. (JK says: Right)

Q. When did you go over then? I know that you've told me you went to Sornco.
A. Oh well that was when we were up at, we were on Jerry's Plains. Workin' at Jerry's Plains. We use to board in at Singleton at the time. We was workin' at Jerry's Plains and we decided, we'd meet and Cecil Thrift decided we'd join the airforce. So anyhow one day we jumped the motor bike, instead a gain' to work we jumped the motor bike. Went to Newcastle, joined the airforce. So we got down there, when we got down there we went in and 'Who ya name?' we give 'em our name and everything 'Where ya from?'. Anyhow, they kicked us out a' the builder: 'Said get back to work'. Pause wouldn't have us.

Q. Why?
A. Wouldn't have us. 'Cause we were in the Civil Construction Corp.
Q. So what did you do?
A. So that's what we did. We went back and old Frank was a decent fella, he said 'Alright, he said 'If you want to go' he said 'You can go.' So he gave us written permission. Come back down again and got down there then. Got into the airforce.

Q. And what areas did you go to when you were in the airforce?
A. Uhh, ahh, lots of areas. Round, down here, around Melbourne, quite a lot. Wagga, went to Wagga. Kapooka, training, that was an army training camp - even though we were in the airforce. In the airforce, never seen an airdfield (wv Palters) never seen a plane. (SK laughs) We was on, then went into an airfield construction corp. I was building airfields again. 'cause they took a lot of it when you went in and asked what you did oh civil like. You told 'em what you did in civil like and things like that. Well that's where they mainly, if you had no um, didn't take any courses oh things like that. Photo course, things like that. They put you into wherever it would suit you best. (SK says: Right) Ok that's where they put me, into a airfield construction, 9-ACS, it was. (SK says: I see).

Q. And is that what you were doing ever in Streez?
A. Then I went to Wagga. We went to Darwin. (SK says: That's right. I was up around Darwin then. I went to Darwin early in the forties. And uh, I had my twentieth and twenty-first birthday in Darwin and Melville Island. I was up there for twenty-six months. Where I left back up there and came home. Well then I came home. I came back home and uh where did we go then? We went down around Melbourne again, around Mount Martha and...
done another army engineers course. Then left from there and uh, went to Balikpapah, Borneo.

Q. Where?
A. Balikpapah (JK says: Right!) 11mm. Well we were over there then till aw until six months, yeah, six months, four, five months after the war finished. We came home from there. That was in forty, forty five.

Q. And where did you meet Mum?
A. Ah, that's a long story. That's a long story, that one.

Q. Was it just at one of the dances?
A. Well, I don't know what happened there (joking). It was a mistake really. 11mm (JK laughs and exclaims: A mistake!) 11mm. We'd al gone out to, we'd all gone to Sydney to a big parade on at Sydney with all the boys and everything and down Pitt Street in Sydney. So anyhow, we thought we'd have a great night in Sydney and 'cause when parade was all over the c.o. (commanding officer) got up and said 'Alright all those blokes, all those blokes that had their name down to go to the dance at Pitt tonight get on the truck, ye goin' home again. So we ended up amin' to get on the truck and go home and they dropped us all off to this bloody dance at Pitt. Didn't want to go. An' I suppose that was me downfall. (JK says: That was your downfall, that was me downfall (JK says: Not much you could have done about it, so it?) No, that was me downfall.

Q. And after, well after marrying Mum, when did you return to Greta?
A. Aw, after I got married, I went to Wollongong (JK says: I remember you telling me that you and Mum lived in Wollongong. Went to Wollongong and uh, we lived at um, we lived at the Black Cat Ode for quite some time. And then from there, we moved out on our own. Down to Cremo House. Was ah, belong to people, name of Tolley's - Tolley's Brandy, owned it. That was
the only building in Warawong. The only building in Warawong, that was. It was a private hotel! It wasn't functioning! It still had no licence. That the 'Open Hearth' Pub at Port Kembla today. One of the biggest pubs in the South Coast.

Q. The name building?
A. The name building? That was the only buildin' there when we were there. We lived in a, in a... We had a flat, they called it a flat. There was one room there (JJ draws on the table with his finger) and the other room was the other side of the hall. That was the flat. (JK, says: That was the flat) That was the flat. We had our cookin' utensils. I can remember our cookin' utensils. We used to have to cook on a primus ordinary kerosene primus, them days. Yeah, yes, we was payin' thirty bob a week, we paid for that. Big money, 'cause I was only gettin' four pounds ten a week and uh, uh, yeah, thirty bob a week we had to pay rent, aw then you had to pay two bob then, to use the washin' machine and the iron. It'd cost ya another two bob a week.

Q. So you returned to Greata, when? What year was it that you came back?
A. Well, we came up here then when ah Geoffrey was born, your brother was born. We had been Forty-six, Forty-six, Forty-seven. (Corrects himself) What am I talking about. I never got married till Forty-six. Yeah, the day before you were born. Remember? (JK, says: This was a family joke when JK was a child)

Q. As far as when you did come back to Greata, I gather the migrant camp had well and truly begun then?
A. Oh yes, yes. It'd be... (Corrects himself) No! No! It wasn't. No. I hadn't started then. (JK, says: Twenty-eight) No, no. There was no migrants started there then. In fact, I think, about that time, uh, about that time, I think, was about the time that brought a lot of um, prisoners of wars there. Italian prisoners of wars. (JK says: Right). They had them there. They had them there before the migrants. I'm sure of that.
Q. And what effect did they have on the Township? Were there any problems there?

A. Not much really, they didn't. I think the main effect up there, the main problems up there was when the army was there. Use to be fights everywhere. Every night of the week, there'd be fights, then days. Because you had a lot of, you had a lot of civilians around there that used to come home from the works of Port Kembla and Sydney and them places and uh, they'd come home at weekends and long weekends and likes that and I think well they resented the army and the army resented them and there was lots of fights lots of big fights.

Q. So then, what happened to the Prisoners of war? The Italian prisoners of war when um, the war was over?

A. Well, I think, they just uh, there I think quite a few of them, I don't know whether they all were sent back home again or whether they, a lot of them dispersed themselves around here, I think. (SK says: Around the area?) Oh, different areas.

Q. And no, and then of course the migrant camp, began.

A. Then you got your migrant camp, yes.

Q. And how did the townspeople feel about the migrant camp? Were there any problems?

A. No they, there were no problems really. I mean uh, because well, I can remember goin' back when they first came here and none of them blokes are still here today and in fact, good friends of mine, none of em. Uh, but, they were the migrants that got out as soon as they came here. When they were young, as soon as they came here, they got out and they mixed with the locals. They mixed with 'em, they drank with 'em, learnt their 'lingo'.

Q. Do I know any of these?

A. Yes. Herbie O'Neill, well he's one of em, he's one of em, 'at came here them days, and Charlie Wronko (SK says OK, yes) Charlie...
Winiwe was another one (SK says: Charlie was) they’re still there. (and Mrs. Rumel? says: JK) Yes (SK says: she was there). Yes they’re all there, but they mixed, they mixed with the town people. Ah, but there’s still some of em there still today, that even forty years after. And uh, they still don’t mix and they still can’t talk a word of English. None of em. (SK says: Still mm, still can’t talk a word of English. Yeah, a lot of em. I don’t say a lot, but there’s quite a few.)

Q. I was talking to you earlier, before we started the um, and you were mentioning about, there we lots of suicides. (ie: of migrants) Can you tell me about them?

A. Aw, they were pretty gruesome at times, some of them. I can remember (SK says: This is suicides of the migrants people) Migrant people, I can remember one chap that I felt very sorry for. I’d heard of them down the bush and the likes of that a friend of mine next door (J.K. s little boy yells outside the window) Ray. It was nothing, for him to come home and he’d find one hanging from a tree down around Bill Beecher that was the old wine shop that use to be down there, years ago. And uh, he’d find hanging on a tree, swingin’ on the branch. Ray use to say. But uh, there was another chap I always felt sorry for him too. I use to have a, I had a lot a pigs over there one time, over the property (Use to own approximately two hundred acres of land between the railway line and the highway at Greta) Oh, that I’d bought, like in previous years, and I had a couple of them pricked one day, an’ cause I happened to find the fella that done it. And uh, I got the police on him, and uh, he had to pay for the pigs of course, but, wasn’t a bad fella after all. He was just, ah, put it this way, easily led an’ illiterate type. And uh, but after he paid me, paid me up an’ everything. Twelve months it took him to pay me. Paid me for the pigs. But then, I always felt sorry for him, because um, he’s um, wife hang herself in the lavatory, and then it’d only be what another, I’d say six months after and uh, the poor devil himself then blew his brains out. Yeah, you know... I always felt sorry for that fella. Even though the trouble...
that I'd uh, well I suppose uh, he's done something he shouldn't. A done. But uh, to think he ended up that way.

Q. It must have been quite traumatic for a lot of them by the sounds of it.
A. I think so too, the poor devils. They put up with a lot. I think they put up with a "hell uv a lot" before they came here. And uh, and uh, their minds just couldn't take it.

Q. But as you said, you feel yourself that those that mixed with the town people coped a lot better.
A. They coped a lot better 'cause they were open-minded and they'd tell you their troubles and things like that and they could get it off their mind, you know. They'd come here at different times, I've known some of 'em, come and showed ye their scars on the backs and likes that, that had happened to 'em in prisons, or war camps, you know. With different... their scars and that on their backs that they'd coped. Some of 'em had a pretty rough deal. Yeah, yeah.

Q. And as far as, did the presence of the migrant camp... did it have much of an effect on the business in the town?
A. Oh yes, yes. I think it did. Yes, it did, it had a big effect on it, you know. There was quite a few shops n, even Dino, on the hill sea (JK rays: that's right). See Dino started off from the migrant camp, when the migrant camp finished, well Dino moved his, had place over to the town. He had a pretty big business, note, and all there, see.

Q. No Dino had a shop over in the migrant camp?
A. Dino had a shop over on the highway. You remember Dino's wife (JK rays: mmm). No, I don't think it was you, it must a been lyn (JK rays: lyn; with the big nose). She used to think a lot of lyn, (lyn to JK's sister- and W's daughter) Dino's wife. Lyn get over there this day and Dino's wife picked her up and paid how lovely she was and this and that and lyn.
looked at her and said 'gee, you got a big nose' (J.K. laughs) Dropped her like a hot cake (I can remember you telling me that story, says J.K.) Anyhow, Dino was one. The poor fella though, he went home and died. Got cancer and went home (Greece) and died. But ah, as I said there was quite a few others too, like as far as businesses go and in smaller ways like a that.

Q. Were there any problems with jobs? Were the towns people unannoyed? Were jobs taken by the migrants?
A. No I don't think so. Here was the same, aw I wouldn't say as bad today but, there was always plenty of work around. I always reckoned there's plenty of work around anytime if you want it enough. No work if you don't want it.

Q. Now looking back over your life in Greco. Is there any one particular change or experience, that you think had a big effect on your life? Was there anything in particular that you think changed or made a big difference?
A. Oh, well I think the war changed a lot of us, in every way. In all ways, you know. I think the war had a big thing to change us in our workforce and what we would do in the future an' everything like that, I think.

Q. And is there anything you'd change if you could?
A. (Pause) Yeah, I'd like to be about, I'd like to know as much now and be forty years younger (J.K. laughs)

J.K. thanks: Right, that's about it Dad, thanks a lot.