

In August 2022 as part of an Oral Histories project for the University of Newcastle Library, Robin Gordon was interviewed by Isabel Whittle, a first-year student undertaking a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placement in the GLAMx Lab.

00:00:04 Isabel Whittle

So, thank you so much, Robin, for agreeing to do this.

00:00:10 Robin Gordon

Thank you for asking me, Isabel.

00:00:14 Isabel Whittle

So we'll just get straight into it if that's OK with you?

00:00:16 Robin Gordon

Yes.

00:00:18 Isabel Whittle

Could you tell us briefly about your family history? So, your early family life and where you were born, et cetera.

00:00:25 Robin Gordon

I was born in 1942 in the Mater hospital at Waratah in the middle of the war. And, at that stage, dad was away in the Air Force, and Mum and I spent the rest of the war between three loving relatives. One was mum's mum at Broadmeadow, one was dad's mum at Neutral Bay, and one was my great aunt at Collaroy Plateau. And, of course, I can't remember those days, but I've got photos, but obviously I was well cared for and well loved, and we were mainly shoved around like that because Dad had bought a little cottage at Eleebana before the war. It was rumored there was a murderer on the loose, and the rellies thought it was far too isolated for the mother and baby anyway, but with a murderer around, that was the end of that. We were never going to be there by ourselves. So, end of the war, home came dad and we settled at Eleebana. About six families, five or six permanent families there then, some weekenders, but it was very beautiful and isolated. It was a lovely place to grow up, I learned to swim there. We had what you'd call the front Bay, which faced Speers Point, Toronto, I don't know, that way. And the Back Bay, which faced Croudace, which was the beginning of Croudace Bay.

00:01:49 Robin Gordon

So, I started school from there. My baby brother was born at Eleebana, and in those days no school at Eleebana, off to Warners Bay school I went with mum on a bike. And until I was old enough to have my own bike, Mrs Taylor, another neighbor who had Jill and Selwyn, she'd have two on the bike, and I'd be on the seat behind Mum, and she'd be up on the pedals and then ride us to Warners Bay school and come home again. I can't remember how we got home, perhaps they came back for us. I don't know, anyway.

00:02:26 Robin Gordon

We were there till third class for my third-class primary school. And Dad and Mum bought a farm up on the road between Warners Bay and Mount Hutton, and there I had an idyllic life. We weren't made slaves on the farm, but Dad had another job and mum was a busy mum and we had our jobs. Heaviest workload there was when the stone fruit came on. We had acres of plum trees and Peach trees, avocado and apple trees, and it was all hands on deck, when that fruit had to come off, you had to get it to market at a certain time, and everybody knew. That was busy.

00:03:11 Robin Gordon

Warners Bay school was only a little school. Lovely little school. I went from Warners Bay sixth class into Newcastle Girls High School. There were no district high schools in those days, and there we stayed till I was just doing my pre-leaving in 1959 and we moved into Corona St Hamilton. It was from that place that I went nursing, and it was from that home in Hamilton South that I was married, so mum and dad were there for a while.

00:03:42 Robin Gordon

I had one baby brother. Mum had a series of miscarriages, she was RH negative, and mum and Dad had a lot of heartache with their babies they lost, but my brother survived.

00:03:58 Robin Gordon

And it was beauty in town, I was able to ride my bike to the beach, to my many school friends who lived around Hamilton South and Merewether. I felt I was in a great metropolis in there, we had shops that we hadn't had at Warners Bay we had everything in Hamilton South, it was very upmarket, I thought. The Co-op store was just down the road. What a place to live.

00:04:20 Robin Gordon

So, from there, that's it. I grew up with one loving grandma in Sydney, a loving grandma and pop in Broadmeadow. Lots of loving great aunts and aunties, mum was one of four sisters, and I was the only child until my brother arrived in the whole family. So, I had lots of lovely doting aunts and birthday parties and things. Mum had baby brother four years and one day after me, so we had lots of birthday parties too. She saved on birthday parties, did mum. So, what else have I left out? I don't know. It was a good life all round. Much loved, lovely life.

Isabel Whittle

Sounds beautiful.

Robin Gordon

It was.

00:05:03 Isabel Whittle

So, from there, could you tell us what prompted your interest in nursing?

00:05:07 Robin Gordon

Yes, now I tell you, this is a confession. I was never going nursing. I had an aunt on mum's side who was a nurse and an aunt on dad's side who was a nurse. And they looked as if they are going into the church to become missionaries. And I thought, if I go nursing, I'll end up a missionary and I didn't want to be a missionary. So anytime the thought of nursing came up in my head, just dismiss it before it even came out of my mouth. I was going teaching wasn't I? Until my 4th and 5th year at high school and I- Jan became one of my really good friends and Jan was hellbent on going nursing, and she brainwashed me. She talked me into going nursing, so we applied- to matron to be interviewed were measured together for our uniforms. We did the leaving certificate and we were told we'd be called in about March.

00:05:58 Robin Gordon

Through the holidays I had a boyfriend at that stage and so did Jan, she ended up marrying her boyfriend. And we didn't see much of each other, so it was a great surprise to me when we arrived on the 9th of March 1960 that Jan didn't turn up. Matron was not impressed, all that expense of making uniforms for her and getting all the papers ready. So, she'd taken the teachers college scholarship. And I didn't. So, there I was, but wasn't I glad, it turned out it was the very best life for me. It was really great. So, the answer is I never ever planned to go nursing. I was there by a big, big con. But I was glad it happened, it was good.

00:06:43 Isabel Whittle

So, a bit of an unconventional pathway into the industry.

00:06:46 Robin Gordon

That's right, con job.

00:06:50 Isabel Whittle

Yep (laughs). So over what period of time did you work for the Royal Newcastle hospital?

00:06:55 Robin Gordon

Training was four years, so I started in March 1960 and I did my finals and graduated in December '63, then I stayed on the staff until I was married. I could have stayed as a married person by then. It wasn't that much before my time that if you were married, you were as a public servant, a teacher or whatever, not able to stay in the employ of government, hospital or school. But no, there were lots of married sisters who lived out. But I was then married, and we went off to Sydney, to a private nurse in Sydney while my husband did more obstetrics.

00:07:41 Isabel Whittle

So, could you tell me what some of the challenges of the job were?

00:07:46 Robin Gordon

Well, they didn't seem challenges at the time, but looking back by today's standards, I suppose they were. We were shift workers, we were trainees, we were virtually apprentices. Not very well paid, but perhaps the reward would be, as you were trained and finished your training, you'd perhaps earn a decent wage. Our accommodation was provided for us in the nurses home. So our weekly wage that we got in our hand was always minus the four pounds it was, \$8.00 a week, for our board. And our board

included all our uniform laundry to be done, linen supplied for our beds and towels. The challenges of a shift worker as a trainee nurse, I suppose, were the fact that you did 3 shifts, 6:00 o'clock in the morning till 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon was the morning shift. Two in the afternoon till nine if you were a junior on the afternoon shift, and 10, 2 till 10 if you were a senior.

00:08:52 Robin Gordon

The night shift came on at 10:00 o'clock and worked till 6:00 in the morning. We had all our lectures out of ward time, so our four years on the wards was all practically, practical training, which perhaps could have been a bit of an overkill for young intelligent people, but my goodness gracious, we were well trained.

00:09:18 Robin Gordon

It was a, almost military training. And the mat-, our very famous matron hall would say of her, of her hospital and her girls; "you'll see my training is very akin to the British military system, but the British military have lowered their standards. I have not."

00:09:43 Robin Gordon

So, it was a very strict- but you know we were looking after people's comfort and well-being and treatment and their lives. And you had to learn to listen to those who were giving the orders. And mostly you didn't question if they were right, 'cause mostly they were. Whether that be the doctors or the sisters or the senior nurses. There was a regime of keep your place, which again, why shouldn't you as a junior, learn the ways that you should behave in that job? And earn your place as you went up the rungs of the ladder.

00:10:28 Robin Gordon

Looking back, I don't think the modern generation would tolerate that sort of-, but it was just the run-of-the-mill for us. We'd come straight from school, this was the only job we'd ever known and, and why wouldn't you just fit in? I mean you wouldn't walk through a door in front of a senior nurse, even a girl a class ahead of you. When you sat to meals in the dining room, which was a very nicely conducted dining room, you wouldn't sit until matron came. You wouldn't leave the dining room except you went to Matron's table and asked permission that you had to go to a lecture or you had to go to the dentist or a mortuary, I don't know what else you'd leave for, but, they were different ways. It was a different time, but it didn't do us any harm. And it turned out girls, and we were mostly girl-, we were all girls at that stage. It turned out girls that were able to run a ward in our own hospital, run most of the departments in our own hospital. Go to another big hospital and hold your head up and know you could do a decent job. Go to a small country hospital, a rural hospital, a remote community where there was hardly anything. You'd be able to know how to have clean and sterile instruments, how to dress wounds. We did first aid. We were trained in theater. We were trained in the central sterilizing department, emergency ward, our casualty, we called it. Um, intensive care. Things were primitive compared to the machines and technology they have today, but, I'm glad, we were well-trained. We learned trust, we learned not to question unless it was really necessary.

00:12:12 Isabel Whittle

So, you mentioned some of the valuable lessons you learned through your training. Could you tell us any more important lessons that you learned during your time as a nurse?

00:12:22 Robin Gordon

I think it was a very good lesson for life. The very practical part of our training has stuck with me in many parts of raising kids, running school canteens, being part of the school community, being part of the council, being part of a Chamber of Commerce. The loyalty you learn, the camaraderie and the trust. There are all sorts of practical ways that I bet I do things in my kitchen and laundry, that only my nursing friends would do. And if other people saw us, they'd think, what are they doing? Yeah, it sticks-, I often feel when I'm doing my cooking, laundry, whatever I feel matron, or deputy matron, are right over my shoulder as they- the eyes would come, we'd have a screen around a bed doing dressings or whatever we were doing. And without even hearing her coming, you knew there were eyes boring in the back of you, watching over the top of the, yeah, I often feel matron's watching me as I measure out flour, or use too much washing powder. It didn't hurt to have eyes watching you, it made you very aware. We were taught to watch, to observe, to report, yeah. It's important.

00:13:51 Isabel Whittle

So, apart from those memorable things that linger with you today, are there any other memorable, or particularly forgettable, experiences that you had during your time in nursing?

00:14:03 Robin Gordon

I suppose, those experiences in the nurses' home and on the wards that nobody else has unless they were a trainee nurse in the 1960s. Um, our uniform, for instance. I can still see some girls coming in late to go on duty, and you wouldn't dare be late to go on duty. You walked across with all those girls going across for that shift, and you would have every cuff done up, and every pin properly in place. Because sure as you had a stocking seam crooked or something else wrong, there'd be some senior waiting for you to tell you how bad you were. Smarten up nurse, this hospital should be proud of you. I can see these kids coming in, and our uniform was a purple and white fine pinstripe smock, virtually. And onto that smock, you had a collar, fixed by a stud at the back and a stud at the front, starched white collar. Over that, you put your apron and the open had big thick straps to the back which you fixed with safety pins. And on you- and over that went a belt, a starched- heavily starched white, belt, again, fixed with studs. Very thickly starched white studs, which came off as you got to the ward. There was a stud box on the ward. You took your cuffs off ready for work, and you didn't dare leave the ward to do any messages or anything else without- you got your cuffs on and you put them on.

00:15:33 Robin Gordon

I can think of hijinks and the nurses' home that I won't go into today, in case somebody's kids might be watching this. I can think of the specialling we did with special people that needed resuscitating or- I can think of little Jenny, a little newborn baby from Medowie, who came in with a dose of tetanus that she'd got in the womb, neonatal tetanus. Now, that child was specialled from almost birth through til, I can't think how old she was, but it was, it wasn't two months, it was more like 13 months. And in those days, there was none of this oxygen coming through holes and pipes in the wall. We had oxygen cylinders you'd wheel to the patient. You had a sucker, that- now the sucking equipment, whatever you call it, I can't remember, was in a box. It was a bird's respirator, from memory, and it was on casters, and you

wheeled that from the women's intensive care there, to the men's intensive care, or wherever you needed in the hospital. This little box'd be rushed by you, or a wardman, or somebody.

00:16:55 Robin Gordon

I can remember the thermometer saga. And as a junior nurse, you were the one to do the three or four rounds of temperature, pulse, and respiration three times a day. And of course, in those days it was a glass monitor with mercury, and you flipped 'em down, flicked down the mercury, and of course inevitably one'd get knocked on a bedside locker or dropped on the floor. And you had to go and confess then to matron that you'd broken a thermometer, and we were- the cost of things in the hospital was emphasized and you wouldn't waste, you'd try to recycle, reuse, all manner of things, but the cost of the thermometer, as well as the cost of 1 bit of paper was known to us. You don't waste. So, you'd take your shame and walk up, in your breakfast break, to matron, to confess that you'd broken the thermometer. And you'd be dressed up and down and told how irresponsible you were.

00:17:53 Robin Gordon

You were allowed three free thermometers, and after that, you not only got the dressing down, you had to pay 1 shilling for a new one. So that was a lesson that you hoped you'd learn, but you didn't seem to ever until you got out of being the junior and didn't have to take the, the temperatures.

00:18:15 Robin Gordon

You have sort of favorites in life no matter what you're doing, and I think about the wards and the people I like to look after. I loved looking after the ladies mostly, but my goodness, if you got a difficult lady, they were awful. Lots of the men's ward were rough and ready experiences, but goodness, if you got some good men patients, they were just delightful. I was always a bit scared in the kid's ward. Not of the kids themselves, but I'm not all that clever with mathematics. In those days, you didn't have ready made-up drugs, for instance, painkillers or sedatives might be a tablet for the adult ward, and you had to break that into whatever size dose you wanted and mix that in with sterile water in a teaspoon. And I was terrified, always terrified, the fractions wouldn't work out, and I'd give somebody an injury.

00:19:10 Robin Gordon

We had wonderful experiences with our lectures, we had wonderful lecturers from the staff specialists at the royal, it was a staff specialist hospital, and our tutors. And our tutors wouldn't just be giving us our lectures or our practical lessons in the nurses training school, they'd come to the wards if they knew you had this procedure or that procedure to do that day, because you were first or second on, and the seniority on the ward team that day, they'd come to either watch you or guide you. It was very carefully taught. We were also taught well by good girls on the wards, the seniors ahead of us, as we did we when we became seniors. We were responsible for, for watching the juniors and making sure they knew the right thing to do. Sometimes it wasn't done all that kindly, but it didn't matter, the harsh lessons stuck, and they had to stick.

00:20:04 Robin Gordon

Uhm, I can remember wonderful trips with the nurses' choir. We had a wonderful nurses' choir with a wonderful choir mistress who was there for years, Mrs Butler. And we'd be singing at, say, our Christmas Festival in Civic Park. We'd been singing at nurses' graduations, we had wonderful concerts that we- we

had girls among us who were great violinists, great singers, actors, ballerinas and we put on concerts. It was a great life up there, I liked it. I can't think of any more experiences that I can think back to, I'll have another day. I'll tell you another day.

00:20:44 Isabel Whittle

So, did you find nursing to be rewarding?

00:20:47 Robin Gordon

Yes, very. Hard, sometimes heartbreaking. That was one good thing of living- about living in a nurses home. As shift workers, you were lucky to have your nurses home right there on the spot. But when you got off after a particularly harrowing time, and some of them were harrowing, you were there among girls that knew. They'd have a pot of tea ready for you, mug of cocoa or something, and you'd just have a great big whinge or a listen, whinge or a listen to somebody else who's having a whinge or a moan or cry. They were mostly good mates. You get good and bad in all groups and there are some that are difficult, and some that are never going to be anything but difficult. But leaving your- it must be a bit like being in the services. That you've got to learn to get on with them or skirt around them, or deal with them. Yeah, the nurses' home living taught me a lot of things, 'cause I was growing up at the same time as we were only 17 and we'd be in charge from 17- You'd perhaps get in there March. We'd have three weeks, I think, preliminary training school, and then we'd hit the wards. And then, all our- all our placements were three months, so three months in the women's medical, or men's surgical, or out to William Lyne. That was another part, I'll talk about that later. Three months in the theater, 3 months rehab, whatever.

00:22:18 Robin Gordon

...And your first night duty. That's what I started to say, sorry. First night duty, you're 17 years of age you've come out of school, you've left your mother's house, where they perhaps fed and watered you and there you are, in the big wide world of the hospital. And you know those old wards, that we called them the Nightingale wards, what did you have up each side, about a dozen each side and another dozen, or a baker's dozen, out in the balcony facing the harbor. You know, there you were, with your little black slippers as part of the requirements that matrons list gave us to go nursing, were a pair of soft-soled black slippers, so that on night duty, particularly in those old wards, they had board floors, and you would softly tread.

00:22:59 Robin Gordon

That was part of the training that I, as a patient now and my friends, too, say the same thing. The girls don't- many- many people where I've been a patient, don't seem to realize the value of quiet and silence for those who are sick. And they call out from ward to ward. Now that was almost a case for dismissal, if you were heard to be disturbing the patients by calling- and that's the other thing, you'd never use Christian names. It was always a nurse or sister.

00:23:37 Robin Gordon

I think, it was a lot to ask of 17 year old kids. You're looking after 30, perhaps, sick people, but we just, we just did it in our stride. You always had, on night duty, you had one sister for the whole hospital. That was the new wing, the old wing, and she was there, clocking on as we did, and clocking off when we did.

Had also two other people called Junior and Senior Deb, I never to this day have known what the word Deb meant, but they would be perhaps the two most senior nurses on that night duty roster, and their job was to roam, either together or singularly, 'round the ward, so at the four-hour- 4 hourly change of position, of some of your difficult or big patients, you needed two nurses to be doing that sort of thing. If you had a death on the ward, one of these girls would come and help you. So, although you were by yourself, there was help at hand.

00:24:34 Robin Gordon

We had a couple of patients go berserk on us, on me, on a couple of occasions and I just picked up the phone and prayed somebody would answer it, because usually they had a pager. There was a fellow had put razor blades into a bar of soap, which is a really good instrument, so nobody suspected he had soap with razor blades, it just looked like a bar of soap and he was after us. Another- he ended up flying down the back stairs with us after him, the back fire escape stairs. I don't know where he thought he was going but we got him. And the other one that really frightened the life out of me, I was at this stage on late late afternoon shift and my friend Jan had come to help me from the private ward into my intermediate ward to help me change some positions, or something, and this bloke threw a chair at Jan. And before I could get him or the chair or Jan. He put a sheet over, you know? You really- They were isolated cases and I dare say, with drugs and things, these days you hear about the nurses being attacked in cas, or as they come or go to their cars. But nobody taught us judo or anything which would have been very handy, wouldn't it? Perhaps they should teach the girls judo these days? Yeah, yeah, anyway, so, all right.

00:25:57 Isabel Whittle

So, you mentioned William Lyne?

00:25:59 Robin Gordon

Oh yes, William Lyne.

00:25:59 Isabel Whittle

What was that?

00:26:03 Robin Gordon

William Lyne was a building on the main road between, we'll say the International Sports Center and Waratah, going through Georgetown. And on a corner and going through that whole block right to one side of what we call the Western Suburbs Hospital, which is still standing, that was a maternity hospital, a government maternity hospital. This government land had a hospital that had been built initially for the polio patients in the 50s, and there were big iron lungs still on the verandas, but by the time I got there, the main men's and women's ward was part of a very forward-thinking scheme that was the 1st in Australia, run by Dick Gibson, Doctor Gibson, to deal with rehabilitation of mainly stroke patients and this was the beginning of rehab training in Australia. If you got a Royal Newcastle hospital girl to work in a hospital where they didn't have such training, we were often required to start the rehab training. It was a wonderful training; it was a wonderful learning curve. We had speech therapists there, occupational therapists, and the nurses. That was that ward, that- those were those two wards. Across further, we had a ward for men psychiatric patients and women psychiatric patients. And then in the

middle, that next building, we had infectious diseases. So, if you had people with whatever infectious disease around the place, they had to go into hospital, that's where they came in Newcastle. Nowhere else that- there. Off that building was a veranda where we had like a mixed girls and boys boarding- almost a boarding school. Because up the paddock from there was what we call the orthopedic school. And that orthopedic school took kids from their parents' cars or taxis that were hired for the day. Kids with all sorts of disadvantages- disabilities, I mean, were there for their primary schooling and one of our nurses would have to be on duty for rehabilitation in the swimming pool or in the whatever gym they had in those days, and also lots of changing of nappies. We had kids that had spina bifida and other conditions that made the poor little things need nappies, and our nurse was on deck for all sorts of things up there. The kids on that veranda were the kids that lived too far away to be brought in by taxi or car the school. They might have come from Swansea or Blacksmiths, that sort of distance, and there we looked after them day and night when they weren't in the school. And, back from all the hospital buildings was a brick nurses' home, and, um, we had fun out there. We had the use of a tennis court next door in the maternity hospital. We had a horse and a cow out there, and if ever you were walking on- we had a Mortuary, had our own Mortuary. If ever you were walking across for whatever reason, you'd be by yourself after dark, it was pretty scary, and occasionally you'd hear the nurses say I heard footsteps behind me, and sister had told us never to panic, never to panic, just keep walking. And on occasions when they've looked around and spend the jolly draft horse coming behind them now.

00:29:22 Robin Gordon

Anyway, that's William Lyne. I think it stopped being as such, perhaps all those services went to Rankin Park. I can't think what else happened at William Lyne. That was the main... (?).

00:29:33 Isabel Whittle

Yeah, thanks for that. And would you be willing to tell me a little bit about Matron Porter as well?

00:29:38 Robin Gordon

Yes, and actually, I found some notes today. I don't know why I didn't have them before. But they're notes that we made when we were interviewing Miss Porter, what have I done with them, and I'll just refer to them briefly while I tell you what I can tell you off the cuff. And it's basically, it's- it's notes written by one of our sisters who was with me when we interviewed Miss Porter. The last interview, she was 96, and she was then in the nursing home at Maitland. And when I first came across Matron Hall [Porter], I had no idea that she knew so very well my dad's family up at Maitland. She was a Maitland girl. And she never ever said anything to me, but her sister, who was not a nurse, was one of our home sisters, we'll call her, but she wasn't a trained nurse, and she was Lil. Miss Porter was Agnes Hilda, we called her Hilda, Miss Porter. And Miss Porter in the nurse's home told me one day, she said I knew your grandparents. And I never ever was game- you sort of didn't speak to those people on personal matters, but as- as time went on, I came to know from a family that yes, the Porters were very much part of Pitnacree Rd, East Maitland. And Hilda Porter told me one day, coming home from Sydney, I drove her home from a nurses' reunion. And Miss Porter, we had a lovely big secondhand mark 10 Jag, and my husband, I was driving and I was conversing with Miss Porter in the rear vision mirror, and she started to tell me things that I'd never dreamt I'd hear, just 'cause she was matron. And by this stage she'd been retired some years, but she was still very much on the ball. She said her mum was either sick, or then

died, when her father was the mayor of Maitland. And because her father needed a lady partner with him on his official duty, she was the one, as the eldest girl, to fill in for her mother.

00:31:52 Robin Gordon

While these duties were her lot in life at that stage, the First World War occurred and her then unofficial fiancé was killed. And she thought, I think it's my young sister Lil's turn to do for Dad what I've been doing, and without telling anybody, she decided- she decided, she thought she'd make a career of nursing, make herself useful in the world, and she took herself on a train without telling anybody down to Newcastle. And there, her words were, I was interviewed by a very young and beautiful Miss Hall, who was the very famous matron we had there for many years. And so, back to Maitland she went, and told them she'd been accepted as a nurse. And reading these notes today I was just reminded that her brother brought her down to the hospital- in those days, I think they had to make their own uniforms and times were hard. It was wartime and they were cutting up bed sheets and things to make aprons and so forth- brother took her down with the ports and he said, well, I'll see you in a fortnight. You won't last the distance down there. And last, she did.

00:33:05 Robin Gordon

And um, she, to me as a trainee nurse, she was my first matron, 'cause Matron Hall had just retired. Matron Porter had been deputy at the Royal for many, many years of much loved most capable deputy. She had the most amazing mathematical mind. She could do rosters the way we use computers now to work out alphabetical order or times and things. Matron could fiddle around with the roster on a wall or in front of her and have it done in no time flat. Great talent, great talent. She was a very good teacher in the training school, if she was needed to teach us whatever and she was a very good examiner. I didn't realize just how stern she really wasn't until I heard the girls who'd be doing the embarrassing thermometer confess up, who'd had to be roused at by Matron Hall. Apparently, Miss Porter was a soft touch compared to Matron Hall who never let her standards slip.

00:34:07 Robin Gordon

She was at the hospital through most of my training and she retired with the next matron- was Miss Hill; so Hall, Porter, Hill, in that order. Famous matrons. And so, then I came to know Miss Porter at the nurses' reunions in Newcastle and in Sydney. The Royal Newcastle Hospital had a Sydney reunion, and she and her classmates were then younger than my grandparents, but still older than my mum and dad. So, they were older looking ladies in their nice felt or straw hats and gloves at the nurses' reunions. We all dressed very properly in those days. And they would often come, and somebody would give them a corsage, or the nurses would give them a little posy of flowers just to pay homage almost. And we heard such stories from them from their time in nursing, and they showed us photos of wonderful fancy dress parades, where we had our concerts, they had concerts, fancy dress parades. And these lovely ladies of course, had gone through much harsher times than we had, but they didn't begrudge it either. She'd say it didn't do us any harm. The same as I've said to you, didn't do us any harm, made us better people, made us stronger, blah blah blah, yeah. Miss Porter, that last visit when we saw her, she was a big woman, a big boned woman, well covered too. And before she was in the nursing home, I used to visit her with my husband briefly, and my children, because my husband was the doctor for the Lakes United football team in those days, and we'd be playing Maitland, and I could no longer sit and watch the football while I had children to look after. I couldn't look after them properly and watch the football, so.

And I didn't want them, as they got older, into all the junky food that was up there either at the canteen, so I'd go to Miss Porter, and her sister Miss Porter, in their home at East Maitland, then in their retirement, and there I'd be given lovely afternoon tea, country afternoon tea, and they delighted in my taking the children.

00:36:20 Robin Gordon

But when I first went to them with baby- my first little baby, Jane, we'd lost a little boy, and Jane was then the new little baby. I said to somebody again the other day, I thought I had an opera singer on my hands. Her squeal., her crying, when she was ready for a feed, would make your ears ring. And on this occasion, all our children are adopted, and on this occasion, we'd picked up Jane from Crown St Women's Hospital on a given Wednesday, and this was the Sunday game or Saturday game of football at Maitland. And in Matron Porter's house that day, I'd fed her, I'd burped her, I'd changed a nappy, I'd rocked her, I'd walk with her, I couldn't settle her. And Matron just said to me, give the little thing to me, and I describe her as the older lady said, she was very portmanteau. And she put my little Jane, who was about this size, on this ample bosom, gave her two Pats on the back, and the little thing went sound asleep. She just loved the little kids. She'd have made a beautiful mother.

00:37:27 Robin Gordon

The people in Maitland used to bring their wares to the Porter Sisters, they were a very well-known Maitland family, and very much respected and loved. So, the lady from the dress shop would bring dresses out for them to the home. The lady from the material shop, and the dressmaker, would bring bolts of material out for them. The furnishers from Pullins furniture up there would bring samples of cloth for the, upholster. They were very much part of the country living up there. They were contributors in their community as she'd been a contributor at the hospital. That last visit from whence came that interview that I can't find for the moment, and I'll give you a copy later. She was then 96, just before she died, and still clear as a bell in the head and very able to string together memories and talk about current affairs still. She was in a wheelchair, and poor old soul had lost most of her hair. And she interviewed very well. Audrey Armitage, who was going to be the author of the book, the history of our training school we were writing, was recording here, and we were taking notes. And when it was time to say goodbye, it was her teatime, and she said, as I was walking away, we'd given her a hug and a kiss goodbye. I was walking away and this voice said Nurse Ewing and I immediately stood almost to attention. As you do, when your seniors speak to you, and I turned and said yes Miss Porter and she said you haven't been to see me for a while and I said no, I'm terribly sorry and I'll I'll see you soon, I'll be back. Right, she said, in the meantime, wheel me into the dining room, please? Right. And the others are just waiting for me. And she said, I want you to put this bib on me, it was one of those big coverall bibs, and I want you to wheel me to the table and I want you to walk away. I don't want you to see me eating. She was obviously- knowing that, mmm. And so, my promise to see her again, I thought in about, I didn't know when, never ever happened 'cause the poor old soul died. Yeah. What- what a fruitful life, though what a wonderful life. She talked to me that day, coming back in the car, about my grandparents. Said lovely things about our family, which was nice, she said as a kid to be in the sulky(?) with her dad and mum going into Maitland to do their jobs. They'd call to see my grandparents to see if there's anything the Ewing family wanted to bring home, groceries, and she said they reciprocated. Talked about Sunday school life with my people, music lessons, all sorts of things that you don't know about your great grandparents. They were my great grandparents, that's right, yeah. So, that was Matron Porter. I loved

her dearly. I never ever heard anybody say bad words about her and her class that she trained with those who are still left that used to come to the reunions, obviously loved her with a passion, mm. That's Matron Porter.

00:40:25 Isabel Whittle

Thanks for that, that was really lovely. So, how do you view the current nursing profession? Do you think there could be any improvements made?

00:40:39 Robin Gordon

Yes. Speaking as a patient, and as the carer for my aged parents, when they've been in hospital. I'm loathe to criticise them for all the extra work they have to do, and by work, I mean the extra technology they have to deal with. I'm- I'm in great awe and admiration of the way- I suppose it's just their way- they've been brought up with the technology, we hadn't. But, sadly, the original training that makes a nurse, a good practical nurse, which is what makes patients comfortable and well treated and cared for, has gone, and I still say there are people who- who are born nurses, who know how to make a patient comfortable, who know how to keep calm in a ward. But the initial training that they're missing out on has been neglected. They've thrown the baby out with the bathwater, as it were. They need, and I've seen I've seen this happen in another hospital where my husband was in hospital a while ago, and I'll talk about that in a sec. They need to almost do our basic training to know how to care for washing a patient properly without hurting or harming, washing them in bed, how to get them on and off the toilets, how to wash their hair or dry shampoo their hair. They need to know about oral hygiene, they need how to- to know how to turn a patient over without hurting. They need how to know- somebody might say to them when they're speaking roughly as I would to my juniors, speak roughly or be rough with the patient? This could be your mother or your granny, or your aunt. It might be you if you're lucky enough to live that long. Do not treat patients any less than you would be treated yourself. It was a good training. There were challenges, but there had to be.

