REFLECTIONS

Anne McIntyre

Interviewed and photographed by

Barry Lane 2/10/89.

Anne, you have lived in a very interesting period of human history, and in an interesting atmosphere in many countries. Are there any highlights?

I was born into a professional family,quite affluent until my father lost everything in 1929. Everything changed then and so my adolescent memories are rather miserable. My father was Edwardian and didn't think girls needed to earn their living so the only respectable way to leave home was to get married. I agree with Margaret Mead about that. Fortunately for me the right bloke came along. War was declared soon after we became engaged, so any plans we had didn't come to anything, but I was allowed to marry younger than I otherwise would have been. My father didn't want me to get married then but he was pursuaded. That first year of married life I look back on with terrific pleasure - the freedom, no responsibilities, an 8 h.p. Austin car and a little cottage that Archie's grandmother owned, and going to art school.

Archie was in a research position at Sydney University, so we lived simply - buying our food on the way home and we couldn't wait for it to be ready. In the mornings we would leave home, go to the University; I'd drop him, and I'd go on to what has become the National Art School at Taylor's Square. At the end of the day I'd go back to the University, and if there was an experiment going on I would go out and get some food, come back and we would have it in the lab. Maybe the experiment would go on till two in the morning. I would turn switches or do what I was told to do. It was good fun.

I haven't said anything about my mother. She was the youngest of a family of eight brought up in the country with no chance of an education. She was very musical and had a trained singing voice later. She hadn't been able to talk to her mother about some things e.g. reproduction, and she determined that her children would be able to ask her anything, and she would answer to the best of her ability. We much appreciated this and when we heard way out stuff from other children we would go home and ask her about it. My sister and I also had the pleasure of knowing that there would be a new baby a couple of months before she was born and seeing her when she was about 4 hours old. Dolls were never interesting after that.

We were very fortunate to have had a good mother. She was a much loved figure to her children and grand children.

The crash was important?

Oh yes. If my father had not given my mother a house for a wedding present we would have been on the street. Lots of families had to sell up and move to seaside cottages or other places, and the children had to change schools and that sort of thing.

It wasn't the done thing for a female to get a professional qualification?

Well lot's of people thought that it was not the done thing to become independent, but ability was sometimes encouraged. My father was particularly old fashioned. He was married comparatively late. His idea was that when we had finished school and had passed our Uni. entrance exam the family would travel and absorb some of our European cultural inheritance first hand. And then I suppose marriage for the girls. Perhaps the Uni entrance ticket was to be an insurance policy but it belonged to the affluent days.

Well, he was actually very good about certain things. When I said that I wanted to go to art school he did his best to find the best art school. At the end of the first year I won a two year scholarship for fees, and there weren't very many in those days. I went to tell him in his office. I hadn't told him that I had put in for it and he said, "All right you can have the money for doing something nice", although he was pretty broke still. So I went ski touring for the first time, with Archie and a pack on my back in the Kosciusko area.

The main thing was that he cared about finding the best available, and if I had said that I wanted to do Architecture he would have sent me to the University. He did send my sister, but I didn't feel sure enough of my ability to manage the academic work. So I opted for the easier thing for me, which was the Art School. I would have got a qualification that would have allowed me to teach art, except for the war. We decided that we would risk having a child. If Archie was going to get killed, I wanted something left. Some of our friends decided not to have children till after the war. We decided in Australia to have one child and then another.

The risk was that you might have been a widow with a child to support?

That's right and you had to face the idea of bringing up the child alone. And so I didn't get my qualification. That was the decision, and I don't regret it. I would do the same again.

The war?

I was lucky in that Archie didn't actually go overseas till towards the end of the war, but it was hanging over us the whole time. He nearly went twice before and it was commonplace for him to ring and say, "Will you pack my bag, I have to go to Darwin tonight." I would ask,"Do you know how long you will be away?" "No" That sort of thing happened all the time. So he was coming and going and we had a couple of little kids.

Michael would have been three, just three, when he did go overseas and if he sent a snapshot back Michael would grab it and keep it in his trouser pocket and it would get crushed in no time. He missed his dad terribly. And Margaret also missed him but it showed in quite a different way. She was eleven months and she flirted with every young man that came to the house, and rolled her eyes and fluttered her eyelashes, and when we were staying in Launceston with her grandparents, the only people she enquired after were Archie's young brother David who was a medical student or Tony her uncle by marriage if he wasn't there. So the young men were important to her.

Was the war a big shock or was it an inevitable slow movement?

I think that it wasn't at all a surprise, even though we hoped that a way could be found to avoid it. But we knew that in the end Hitler had to be stopped. The first year of the war was odd because nothing much seemed to happen. This was not only in Australia but also in Europe. It was after that first year that the real action started. Things didn't get horrific for quite a while.

We were very simple loyal British subjects and we just sent everything to help England. At this time (about 1942) when the Japanese invasion was a real threat, we had nothing, except a few training planes, like tiger moths, and small sporting rifles. There were schoolgirls running properties and old women doing lots of jobs. There were very few able bodied adult people in the country. It's hard to imagine what it was like. The Japs were stopped by Malaria and the Americans. I remember Archie saying in a letter that he had seen "three of them", meaning three American planes.

What about the reconstruction?

After the war Archie got a fellowship to do his postgraduate training. It was a fellowship for married ex-servicemen and the Rockerfeller Foundation gave Australia three. The Australian Government said that they were worth too much money and so they made it into four. Archie got one of those. He went to New York and we followed. We hit the post war housing shortage and had to pay $120 for a $40 apartment. This meant as a family of five we had less money for food than an American family of four had on the dole. The children's eyesight deteriorated markedly because of their diet and I came back weighing seven stone. My normal weight is nine and a half stone. Archie was a little better off because he got a cheap lunch at the Rockerfeller Institute.

And again a certain amount of that experience I don't regret. I regret the length of time. Several people on those fellowships didn't stay, because they found it too tough. For example I remember an Englishman used to war time rationing and a Swiss scholar who returned. Archie was offered a second year* and scientifically it was very productive, but I am not sure that it was wise from a family point of view.

* in Cambridge, UK

We went to New Zealand from there. Jack Eccles, by far the most distinguished physiologist in this (Australasian) part of the world at that time, with the exception of Macfarlane Burnett, kept offering Archie positions and the Rockerfeller Foundation didn't mind if we went to New Zealand because as far as they were concerned it was the same as Australia. So we went to Dunedin and it took us quite a while to get on our feet because we had spent every cent we had. And Archie was offered a job at a certain salary and when we got there it was less, and that wasn't very nice.

New Zealand is a good little country. There are lots of things that I admire. As far as our financial standing in the community was concerned again it was very tough on us, because at that time there was no structure for loans. The University didn't back staff housing and we had no family there. If we had come back to Sydney someone would have guaranteed us a loan. Our generation was the spearhead of all sorts of changes. We had for the first three years we were there an old house that was colder inside than it was outside. Archie called it a "rheumatic fever house". 90 Queen St

For the first couple of years we had no really hot water and we had an ancient fuel stove in the kitchen in which the water jacket was worn out. I've never been so dirty in my life. This house was on a steep hillside facing south so we got no winter sun. At one stage something was wrong with the bathwater getting away and Archie crawled under the house and found that the bathwater just fell on the ground underneath the house. It was Archie's mother getting killed which allowed us to get our first house which, again, wasn't very nice.

Being Australians in New Zealand we didn't get any exserviceman's benefits that other families did.

The next great revolution that happened for the next generation of women was the pill. Speaking to women who have always thought in terms of having the pill, always surprises me a little. It's a freedom that wasn't ever there before. Absolute revolution.

I think that that single thing more than anything else could pave the way for much more equal relationships between the sexes. Archie said for instance that it was burdonsome for him to have the total weight of looking after his family financially, and having a dependent wife, so I think that all sorts of things could open up for all sorts of people because of this single new piece of knowledge.

One of the things that I feel very strongly about is that one of the most wicked things people can do is to bring unwanted children into this world. It's hard enough when they are wanted. And I don't agree with single parents. I know tragedies happen and single parent families are sometimes unavoidable, but to plan it is indefensible. I think perhaps that there needs to be a lot more education of what's involved for the children and the parents possibly even from a very young age. I think it's quite difficult for anyone of the next generation from me to even think of what it was like before. Talking of sexual freedom I certainly think that the western world went overboard with that for a while. Certainly we never had anything like that in our younger days.

What about electronics? Radio etc.

My family had it's first radio when I was 15, but we had a gramophone. Actually one of my first memories is my father's long black legs in pumps dancing with me when that was all that I could see of him. We were dancing to a gramophone record. I can't remember when we got television, probably in New Zealand. It wasn't part of my background. I think that television can undermine you in a lot of ways. It's very difficult to choose programmes. They are always advertised as if they are always marvellous. They don't give you really any idea of what you might be seeing, and I think there could be a lot of improvement in that so that you have better ways of choosing. I would also like to see some of the better things shown in prime watching time rather than at midnight. I think the attitude towards television is that people have them on all the time, so what does it matter. There have been studies done to show the effects of the blank screen. It turns off the mind. I think that it's quite a danger that violence may result as a consequence of television. And if it stopped kids from learning to read I think that would be awful.

What about "labour saving devices?"

The first bit of equipment we bought was a vacuum cleaner because of hay fever, and I certainly think that that's been a marvellous thing. And I think that refrigeration is good. I didn't have a washing machine till I had three children, and well I like to have a washing machine. I'm not so sure about dishwashers.

Well how come we are so busy?

Because we have to supervise them, and now the work is all left to one or two people.

We haven't invented a self ironing machine yet.

Well we have the crushed look.

I'm sure you have some opinions about the motor car.

Well I like cars and one of the things that does surprise me is that children hate going in cars quite often now because it confines them. I think that it would be better if we could organise it so that we didn't have to use cars every day. But the idea of transport from your front door to where you are going is very nice isn't it.

If you are living in a big city and sitting in traffic often, I think that it creates immense frustration and makes people feel violent and makes people take risks. The motor car has also allowed for the development of these incredibly awful big cities, which I think are a cancerous growth, humanly speaking, on society.

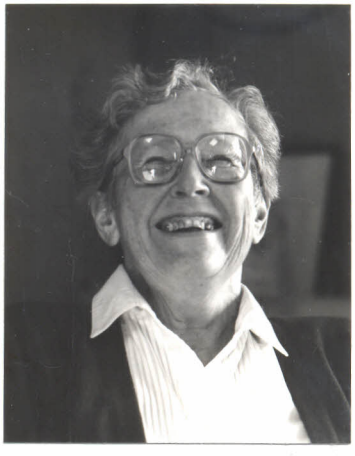
You lived in the depression. Do we sell the world for the sake of jobs?

Well I think there has got to be a fundamental change against growth and towards husbandry. I think that our wage structure would be better geared towards a single person and not a married man with two children.

For instance, a woman at home bringing up children and making other contributions to society is regarded as a working person and paid with an allowance for children until they leave home. This is not money for nothing.

If people have more time then people can do with less money, but as Ghandi said there is enough for man's need but not for man's greed. And play. What about parents playing more with their children?

CHILDREN



What about your children? You must have some pleasant memories.

I remember Michael's childhood well. He was the first.There were so many incidents that were memorable; like the first time he corrected me for a loose and inaccurate use of words.

Margaret was in a playpen so he would have been between three and four. My mother in law's cat walked into the playpen and out the other side. I said " Michael look at Pickles walking through the bars." And he didn't look up from what he was doing and he said "Through the holes you mean."

And then again a musical memory. We had bought the first recording of Peter and the Wolf on 78s and I had heard it several times. I was washing the dishes and humming one of the tunes and he was about 18 months then and toddling about, and he said,"That's the cat." And I said "yes", and so I hummed all the other tunes and he knew them all and he had heard it only once.

So he was an extremely interesting child for me. Sometimes when I'm feeling a bit naughty I ask people to define a tap. Well, Michael aged seven, said" A tap is a valve to control the flow of fluid; liquid or gas."

That's what I mean by a whole concept. He didn't leave anything out. He was so responsive as a small child. I had a marvellous time with that. Having married Archie and having a child like that to play with was terrific.

And you can imagine how, over the years, he has interlocked, so to speak, with his father intellectually. He used to tap information from Archie until he had extracted it all.

It must have been great being a spectator?

Sometimes that got a bit irritating when you wanted to say something. I couldn't get a word in edgeways.

I found it very interesting of course and I felt privilaged to have this child to bring up.

What about your other children?

Margaret was very much a wanted baby and from our point of view, perfect. She was a very lively child and rather tiring because the little wretch never slept much and always seemed to want more food. We thought later that she might have been better on a modified demand feeding regime than the rigid Truby King timetable which was the custom then. But when you are in the middle of it and very busy....!

One of the special moments was when the two children first had a conversation with each other - nothing to do with adults. They played together very happily.

Margaret showed her special feel for co-ordinated action at a very early age. For instance, as a child between one and two in the big bath tub with Michael she would often play a game crawling up the sloping end of the bath and sliding back under the water and come up laughing and spluttering. She was a natural when it came to things like skating, skiing and dancing.

I felt that two children were as many as I could comfortably manage, so when Richard came along I felt that one or other was a bit neglected. I tried to alternate the neglect between them.

They are all special to me in different ways and Richard is no exception. One of the things I remember especially about him is his sense of humour and the absurd. He could be very funny. He had a bit of a struggle at times keeping up with the others. A psychiatrist friend once said, "It's the younger child's privilage to be teased by his siblings." But he had a mind of his own and when he got going he did very well.

Would you do anything different as a parent?

I did the best I could. Obviously I made mistakes and there are some things I regret - for instance, not having enough time or energy to play with them. But I could not have done better in the circumstances and with what I knew then.

ART

Where did your interest in art begin?

It was before school. I actually had an aunt who lived in Paris and she was one of D'Atillo Reubo's students and he said he couldn't do any more for her and that she ought to go to Paris. She was there at the turn of the century during the time of the Impressionists. Her life has been tragic really because she has never done anything with it. She used to come out every two or three years at Christmas time and bring us exotic French presents and I suppose I used to think that when I grew up I would go and live with Auntie Doris in Paris. My parents were encouraging. I remember being allowed as a small child to leave the dinner table and paint a particularly dramatic sunset. That memory is very strong. I kept that painting for a long time but it got lost somewhere.

The impulse began at a very early age. I never did art at school because I was always in the academic stream, but in my last year at school my father got a teacher for me who came one afternoon a week at home after school. That allowed me to go into the National Art School at the Second year level. My father wanted me to stay at school as far as University entrance and so he arranged this extra coaching. He took a lot of trouble to find the best Art School for me afterwwards.

Any painting or drawing I did was spare time stuff, not terribly much I don't think in my school days. I spent three years at art school. It was a five year course and I didn't finish it because the war was on, I was married and I decided to have a child.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at art school. I went up into the painting studio after one term so that really meant that in the middle of the first year I was at third year level. Well, most of the kids went to art school,at 14 so really it shows that it is not a disadvantage to continue general schooling a bit longer. You catch up very easily.

Was it a dissappointment to have not quite finished?

Well it stopped me earning any money or getting a job. I don't think I had time to have a career when I was bringing up kids, I think that I didn't have enough vitality really to do both those at the same time. Anyway I was too interested in watching these creatures develop.

Painting has always been your love?

Yes, I've been interested in it all. Painting and drawing particularly but I have always had an interest in sculpture although I have never done any. People today will not understand that only 25 to 30 years ago we did not have the advantage of television, colour films or good libraries and so the best I could do was to look in a few books in a library to see any of the Renaisance paintings and even then colour was a rarity. Neither did we have any teaching of the History of Art at the Art School.

You see, the collection of European art in the Melbourne Gallery was exceedingly important for a student at that time. It was the only collection of any merit from our cultural past in Australia.

The Sydney Gallery, at least when I was growing up, I don't know now, had a rich collection of Australian art but nothing much from Europe, and coming to Melbourne was a big journey. One didn't do it very often. I came once before I was married and so I didn't know that gallery very well. But it was amazing to me to be able to go and look at a Rembrandt in there.

What was your main topic? Landscape?

Well that's a hard one because I never really did that much of anything. Well Dobell was certainly someone who impressed me enormously although his sort of portrait is not the sort that an Institute would commission. I think painting "people" would always have interested me and I have always been able to get a likeness with drawing, even as a child.

Dobell tried to get the feeling of the person as much as the likeness. I appreciated that enormously. When I was a student Dobell came back from England and if I'd had 12 quid I'd have one now. The students were the only people who appreciated him at first, and one or two perceptive critics. One would go into an exhibition by the Society of Artists, and in this big room the Dobells simply stood out. They were so powerful. Marvellous humour too as well and really strong. It is difficult to find words. Strong powerful but not clear in the photographic sense. A bit mysterious.

Whenever I go to Canberra I go to the war memorial to see the Dobells. There is that marvellous one - The Billy Boy - great fat worker with his arms folded, and then there is the cement worker with cement all over his hands and his thumbs hooked through his braces.

That man could not belong to any country except Australia. It's a marvellous portrayal of an Australian workman. Dobel was a teacher at the school, and he was not a good teacher because he found it tremendously difficult to put into words what he believed.

He taught me, and he was a very shy man. It was a privilege for me. He was only teaching for bread and butter but he did say one thing to me about drawing. He said "Understand the form and draw it. It is nothing to do with the light falling on the subject and so on." That is something that I have always remembered and tried to carry out.

People have always been my line of interest, but I wouldn't like to be a professional portrait painter at all. One of the things I have always felt is that art in itself shouldn't be tied to earning a living. You should do something else. Fred Williams once said that. I heard him talking to a bunch of students and he said, "In this school there are 200 of you students and maybe 5 of you will become artists, but don't expect to earn your living that way. You've got to do something else otherwise your work may become potboilers." You've got to be free to experience your reaction to another person or to the environment without thinking, "Will somebody buy it?"

Fred Williams was a very good framer. He learned that craft while he was a student in London and it kept him alive. He said, when he came back from Europe to this continent, that he was struck with the featureless landscape and if you think of his painting that's what he is saying. There is a tremendous sameness, and an enormous feeling for space but there is no focus.

So you have tended not to specialise?

I like landscape and I've been interested in printmaking lately. I haven't done much printmaking because I seem to have to goad myself. Portraits are time consuming and exacting. It has got to be correct, right structurally,and still it can be dead. Keeping the sitter interested while you're doing it is quite a job. Cezanne didn't care. He told his sitters to sit like an apple.

I like all forms of art. I like good photography too for that matter.

How is your feeling for the direction that art is taking at the moment? Are we too diversified?

It has to be diversified with all this modern communication. It's in a sense got to be universal so that people from different backgrounds and cultures can react to it. So in a sense it's reduced to essentials,and I think it's too soon, probably, for the diversity to come back into it. I was looking at some things recently that were called drawings and they are almost like a kid's finger painting. To me it's not usually very interesting. I like to see some skill.

But again you see there are some universals like the Greek "key" pattern, like the Polynessian designs. Our Aboriginal designs are less formalised than some but they still have a lot of geometry in them.

So there are universals, I think, and maybe this relates to the archetypal bit about the psyche. Out of any of these things you get the most beautiful, simple, skillful things coming, but this is only occasionally. I suppose to be artistically educated really allows you to appreciate skill when you see it, just as, if you have learned the piano even if you are not much good you still appreciate it when you hear somebody like Brendal.

We have access to so much these days that we get a lot of what might be called junk. It's not properly digested. But the skillful and the valuable will show out among the junk because it's value is still there. There is always a great deal of skill and work behind it. It doesn't just happen.

Are you excited by this technology?

I personally am not interested in doing things quickly. I think that it's more important to really work on something over a period of time, and to leave less. I don't like too much stuff.

If you had something to say to a budding artist what might it be?

I don't think that it's easy to say any particular thing except that you have to make a commitment if you are going to get anywhere. I have some small floppy wire sculptures, by my grandaughter Rachel in my sitting room at the moment and in one sense they are a bit of a nuisance because it is difficult not to knock them over. But I think they are good enough to warrent being a nuisance.

One thing about art is that it is never a matter of convenience?

Well, you see, again it's always where do you draw the line isn't it? To go off drawing is a selfish thing to do. I mean I'm using the time for myself. And yet I think I need time for myself. And I think that scientific research is a selfish pursuit like any other art.

What is that nebulous characteristic we call quality in art?

Well the role in art has changed with the times. The qualities we looked for in Renaisance art is nothing that we look for now. It's different. We have more knowledge of some kinds than they had then. The role for paintings was different. It was recording mainly. I think that's important. Art belongs to the time, and the good art of the time says something universal about the time. It is something important to be seen by succeeding generations but not generally understood now. The quality is there if people look for it and if you have studied it you are more likely to see it. If you are prepared to put time into looking with visual art, or listening with music, then you will find it.

Is high quality related to the ability to evoke a response?

It can evoke a mood. I have a picture in my sitting room that I think is like a dream and people get worried when they can't work out exactly what it is. But it doesn't worry me.

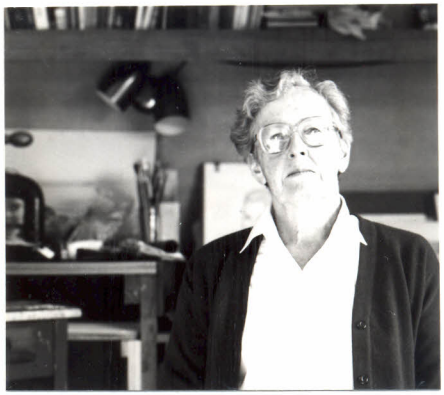
Good art and literature is good because it is. If you are studying art then a certain amount of dissection is useful but in the end you just go back to the whole thing don't you? And your response to it is what matters.

You can appreciate on an intellectual level all sorts of things that for you have no emotional content, or do not speak to you personally. You can appreciate a skill without it speaking to you personally. I don't think any one person is in the position to appreciate quality over all human activities. Good artists will speak about things ahead of the general understanding of them.

Science, music and the visual arts are very important universal languages that can speak right across all cultures.

I have spoken about the chaotic nature of some of the drawings and paintings that are done today, and I think that it does reflect the times. There is so much change that is very difficult to digest and there is so much more information available that people have become confused, I think, and that shows. That is one of the things about art. It must be an expression of its own time otherwise it is of no real value. And it is likely therefore that present day art is actually reflecting the chaotic nature of our time.

ARCHITECTURE



Where did your interest in architecture begin?

If my father had not lost his money I probably would have studied Architecture. I knew that I wasn't a very gifted student. It would be very expensive for him, and I was a little ambivalent about whether I wanted to do Painting or Architecture. If I had done Architecture I would have liked to have done Structural Engineering as well and this again was really difficult in my day, being a female. I would have had to have been an outstanding student. I would have had the support of my father but I didn't feel confident about doing that.

Your father seems to have been a remarkable man.

Yes and I've been appreciating him more lately. He felt such a failure because he had lost his money. He was very unhappy during my growing up. He was a lawyer, but he had wanted to be an architect as I found out later on.

What about architecture intrigued you?

It was probably a feeling for spacial relationships. I was fortunate in growing up in a very beautiful house built by Hardy Wilson. He was a rather eccentric and gifted architect in Sydney. He went round the bend, I think, in the end. He has also done a series of drawings which are very well known of beautiful buildings from Governor Macquarie's time in Sydney. I grew up in the house that he built for himself.

It was regarded as so ugly by the people who lived around there then that they partitioned the Council not to allow it to go ahead. It's listed in the National Trust now! It's a very simple rectangle and he designed the garden with the house. The frontage was 100 feet and the depth of the garden would have been probably 3 or 4 hundred. Below that was a block of native bush that also belonged. It was a very simple house for the time and the proportions of the rooms were beautiful. I didn't realise, of course, that it was a lovely house until I left it.

The other memory is that I often went to stay with my grandmother- (my father's mother)- who was also interested in Architecture and had a very nice house in Belleview Hill. Her house always seemed fussy to me when I got home. So I really appreciated the simplicity of our house.

Again one doesn't think of it conciously as a child. You just react to it. So I think that my heredity, my father's feeling, the fact that he bought that house and the fact that I grew up there certainly had an effect on me. If I went to places like Sydney University and saw those stone buildings certainly I would remember them. Also I liked the Art Gallery in Sydney. I liked lots of things in Sydney. I liked the Harbour, Wooloomooloo Docks and all that sort of thing.

I don't remember conciously thinking of architecture really until the end of school and the question of "What do I want to do?" Then it seemed attractive.

I'm not really much of a feminist but I do think that women have a contribution to make, particularly in domestic architecture. Up till now in our culture they have had to run the houses and live mostly in them, and there are things that are important to them that are not often considered by male Architects. So it's paticularly in the domestic sphere that I think women have a contribution to make, but that, of course, is not where people make money. There's a lot of work in designing houses and not much reward, financially, from a professional Architect's point of view.

Houses are one off, whereas there is a lot of repetition in, say, a block of flats.

Much later in life I did work as a part-time draftsman and I loved it. It put me in touch with thinking spatially. That's when I found out that details are important and can be so much trouble.

I learned these skills by working in an Architect's office in Melbourne where my contribution was to answer the phone and to colour the plans in water colour which I was quite good at. In return I learned the technical drawing needed for designing.

That's the closest I've come to being an architect. I have designed several houses. Three for others and three for us. There was one in Dunedin. I didn't know anything then, but it worked - probably because of my feeling for spaces.

It is difficult to say which was my favourite. I think the one we lived in on the edge of the Monash Campus was a good design for the situation and the block. (Beddoe Ave.)

One of the restrictions was that to get the sun it had to be built facing across the block. It was sold to an academic who likes it so much that I can go there any time I like and if they want to do any alterations they get in touch with me. That's rather pleasing.

There were three living areas on that block. The house was itself about 16 squares with a grannie flat on the back which was 6 squares and an outside studio of about another 6 squares. The student housing officer who was a very good one said when I showed it to her, "Oh, I didn't think there was anything like this in Clayton." We had tennants in the flat and since access and privacy were carefully worked out we didn't bother each other and it worked very well.

Another house was for an academic who had a large family of six and they had never really had adequate housing. They had come from industrial England. They wanted everything; a private area for themselves, where they lived and entertained; a family room, a private area for each of the children and a double garage. And it couldn't cost much because they didn't have any money.

They were unusual people in that they could accept something that was unconventional. The ceiling followed the roof line and under the highest area was slung a mezzanine gallery which was their bedroom. Now you couldn't see if the bed was unmade because it was so high. Then in the middle of the house was the service block, kitchen and laundry, and upstairs was their bathroom, above that.

On the other side of the service area was the big family room running the other way, and below that on another level was a double bedroom and a single bedroom, because I felt there had to be some cut off bedrooms somewhere. Above the family room and those bedrooms on the lower level was a gallery with three cubicles 7 ft. by 10 ft. overlooking the family room but again with a balistrade up to three feet. The other side of these were three cupboards reaching to the floor.

So those 7 by 10 areas had a bed a bookcase and a desk. The family was worried that there was no sound separation but I didn't think that it mattered since it was a family house. And it worked beautifully. They said that having lived in that house they couldn't live in an ordinary house ever again. And then when they had all that, they said they wanted a rumpus room as well. We got it all in and they had a wow of a time.

At one stage in the development of those children there was a big girl in the single bedroom, three boys in the cubicles and the two youngest, a boy and a girl in the double bedroom. At this particular time they all changed bedrooms. No one had discussed it but it seemed to have all taken place within the subconcious, and they had a different space each. Isn't that strange?

There was one thing about that house, indeed about two houses that I designed in Melbourne, and that is that the steep sides of the roof were a little bit too steep. You do get constraints in designing but ideally the southern sides of the roofs were a little too steep for comfort. But it worked.

It's easy to design a house for one person but when you get eight people it is much more complex. They were, however, marvellous people to deal with.

Another house in Launceston was for an older man, and that was much less adventurous and much more ordinary. I very much wanted to have another room in that house which would have meant that he could have had a housekeeper living in when he needed it, but I couldn't convince him. That was quite a nice house but really it didn't give me any scope to use my imagination.

I couldn't possibly tell you how much time it takes. The concept is easy but the details take more time. The worst job is drawing it in perspective. I always find that hard and it has to be done at the end of the job to show how it would look to the client.

The biggest project must have been the place you are living in now?

Yes! That's a bit unconventional isn't it? It's not a balanced design. The roof looks very odd from the air. The house itself is about 16 squares. Having very little corridor space keeps it compact. I am pretty well satisfied with it although I'm not entirely satisfied with the workmanship. One of my problems is that I don't have any authority - a piece of paper - and again not very many men will work happily for an unknown female. I knew that New Zealand workmanship on the whole was a bit rough but straight forward and honest.

S. Launceston hilltop, probably. Largely wooden construction. Built by a NZ builder, it seems. -MSW

I suppose the only thing I don't like about New Zealand entrepreneurs was that after we had been negotiating for about a year and it was pretty well signed on the dotted line, the firm said to me that they couldn't build the roof that I had drawn and they would build it their way or not at all, so to speak. That threw out the whole design. The interconnection of the whole plan is something that most people don't understand. Anyway I felt that if I didn't say yes, we would never get it built. In the end three men came over from Melbourne and put it up in three weeks. And that didn't work terribly well because in the end with no days off they were tired and missed their families and they really didn't take the trouble to finish things properly.

Now, no roof is the pitch that I planned, and the fact that I agreed to their conditions meant that the height of the walls changed, therefore the link to the original shed was spoiled. And there were all sorts of other little things like that, which means that there are some views of the outside of that house that make me shiver. They don't show as you come in luckily but it took me a long time to be able to link those buildings in a way which didn't offend me visually.

Talking of domestic architecture I think that when designing one should think in terms of versatile spaces. That is, spaces that can be used in different ways, at different times, at different life points. An average suburban house is normally designed for mum and dad and two little kids who aren't always going to be around to use that space and aren't little for very long.

A versatile space can be used as a combination living room dining room, a music room or anything else. The size of the spaces has an influence on that. If you have ever owned a grand piano and looked for a house to put it in you'd be surprised how few houses will take a grand piano. In a house you need various sized rooms and they need to be arranged so that people can be together or apart. Again it depends on the ages of the people as to how they are used.

The other thing that I think is necessary, is attention to detail. For instance taps. Now I have views about taps. All taps should be mixing taps. They ought to come out of the wall. It is so much easier to clean a basin that does not have taps coming from it.

The other thing is that in a shower recess you must have the cold tap nearest the person standing outside the shower. In other parts of the house taps have to be consistently placed with hot on one side and the cold on the other otherwise you will go nuts. It doesn't matter if the shower is different from the rest of the house. It is too dangerous for children, and indeed anyone, to have the hot tap nearest the operator.

Personally I don't like wall to wall carpet. I know it's comfortable and warm, but I think a house should be warm without having to resort to that, and the reason is that it limits the use of the room. If you want a soft floor covering, cork is beautiful, parquetry is beautiful, rugs are nice where you sit but you can't start oil painting in a room with wall to wall carpet. Or even making a boat or whatever. I think carpet is expensive and it wears out in the doorways.

Windows. The best venlilating system that we have are double hung windows. They are easy to screen if you want to do that, but you can have as much or as little air coming through those where you want it. Another sort of window I like is the viewing part of the window clear of everything else and perhaps a ventilating pane in the bottom and the top. Any division in floor to ceiling glass needs to be low enough to keep the view clear when you are sitting down.

If windows slide sideways it is not at all the same thing as an up and down sliding window. I don't think they are satisfactory ordinarily. In the Beddoe Ave. house next to Monash I did have the second kind of window I mentioned with a small sliding section at the bottom and hoppers at the top. It worked fairly well. In that house the living areas were not much wider than 12 feet. I used the Japanese idea of extending the room visually to a paved area at floor level and a wide overhang at ceiling level and building bookshelves the full width of the room at the end. This all gave a feeling of greater width.

There are lots of things that can be done to make your spaces change value.

How important is simplicity?

I think it is the ultimate and it requires good workmanship. My ideal is simplicity. A certain amount of decoration is valuable here and there, but I do think that things of good design from any period will go together. In other words you can have good modern stuff with Sheraton chairs or anything else. Modern Italian and modern Japanese go together. Quality enhances quality.

There was a man who had a very expensive antique shop in Sydney when my parents were getting married, and his advice to young couples was, "Make do with packing cases till you can buy what you like." I think that's very good advice.

There is a tendancy for Architects to build monuments and of course the glossy magazines give ordinary people quite the wrong idea of what they need. We are going to have to do with less space each, so if we can keep it simple it is much more usable.

FAMILIES

Has family life changed in your lifetime?

In my day a woman would never have thought that she would have a lot of time as an adult to do anything but bring up a family. My mother was the youngest of eight children who lived. The first two in that family died. So my grandmother had ten in her family. Now I don't know how on earth she did all that with obstetrics not as they might have been. All that, was probably all that she could do. So now if you consider a married couple - I'm going to say "should" - should not have more than two children, then there is a lot of extra time.

What do you think we have lost?

I suppose that larger families were attractive groups because there were a number of people securely based that one knew well and within that group there were one or two with whom one had a special relationship.

What might we, with value, put into family life in the future?

With the prospect of small families, I could see the idea of family groupings, like a small village would become more important.

I think with a better understanding of time - the fourth dimension - in the flowering of the human, possibilities both physical and psychological are immense - disciplined of course!

Are you committed to marriage as an institution?

Yes. Margaret Mead suggested that there should (there's that word again) be two kinds of marriage; one which is easy to contract and easy to break and which concerns two adults only, and a second kind which is hard to contract and hard to break and concerns two adults with a commitment to raising children. The community might require such people to do some training, perhaps with a counsellor, to make sure they understand, as much as possible, what this commitment entails.

What do you think makes for so much breakdown in marriage?

I think the present freedoms lead to unreal expectations. The advances in communication and the propaganda and advertising that young people are subjected to have the negative aspect that they can be used for good or bad not possible formally. That can lead to unrealistic ideals of what marriage 'ought' to be.

ECOLOGY

I know you have some views about what we are doing to the earth.

David Suzuki is saying that we have to take the long term view and that's a view that I have held for a long time too. I think the short term view is very destructive - for example, the overuse of plastic bags. I have been taking a shopping basket when I go shopping, and at the beginning they took very little notice, but recently people are saying things like, "Yes, we will have to take that seriously won't we?"

David Ellyard says that one good idea we could incorporate is to make high technology available to creative people and see what happens. You see, quite often in our society we have people with ideas but they never come to fruition because they don't know how to make them available. But that seems a good idea to think about.

What is the thing that YOU think we can do to save the Earth?

Well I think the planet Earth is the most important thing , certainly. David Suzuki again said it very clearly. Basically we are animals and we need clean water, clean air and clean food and if we don't leave that to our children then nothing else is any good at all. So I agree with that.

I think another thing that we are losing is variety. With modern communication we as individuals have access to such an enormous range of the fruits of human endeavour that within our own society, I think we are getting less and less choice. If you go shopping and you are looking for something you find that all the shops have the same stuff. It was not always like that. I think that there is a place for handmade articles more than we use at present. I think that machines are very useful things to do the drudgery and many of the ordinary things but we could learn to really appreciate hand made things more.

Will women one day rule the earth?

What a suggestion!

If you were to pass on to your grandchildren any values, what would they be?

To keep an open mind.

In what they choose to do, to strive for excellence.

To be tolerant.

And I suppose to have enough sadness and difficulty to appreciate the good things. Without conflict or struggle we wouldn't even know the difference.

I would charge them to think about the planet Earth and to strive to leave a plus. I've always planted trees. Mostly I haven't had much to do with them when they are fully grown, but it's quite interesting to go back to the places one has been and see what has happened to the trees one has planted.

One of the things I have difficulty with, is where to draw the line, and that goes for all sorts of things like self development and unselfishness.

One of the most interesting books that I have read lately is "The Chalice and the Blade" by Eisler. The main theme is that with modern tools, Archeology is being looked at again and there is evidence of a pre-neolithic culture based on agriculture and the life and death cycle. There is no evidence of either weapons or fortifications and there is evidence of a truly peaceful society based on co-operation and equality between the sexes. It was destroyed by the nomadic people moving in from the periphery. Nomads are necessarily male dominent because the women have firstly to nurture the young in a continually moving society.

I actually think, though I don't now belong to any church, for us Christianity is a magnificent philosophy and that the message of Christianity is a religion of how a person can experience joy. And that means a discipline. I think that's the message of Christianity and I think it's very rarely put across by the Church.

If it were put across, people would flock to the idea. Turn the other cheek is for instance put forward as a negative thing and it is not a negative thing at all. It's accepting something you might find unpleasant in order to understand something else. I don't know quite how to put that.

If you read the life of Ghandi, I think that he is probably the best example of a saint in my lifetime and he did literally turn the other cheek. He never hit back. He allowed himself to suffer and achieved more than if he had gone about it differently. Long term thinking again.

One hundred years from now, what would you like to see happening?

Well I would like to see everything blooming, the deserts retreating, things in the environment being cared for, and people interested in things other than material. We have to have food and a roof and warmth but we can do it simply, and not waste so much. We get cluttered up with all sorts of unimportant stuff and with my interest in design I see some dreadful things. What can we do? We can't burn them any more because we wreck the atmosphere, so,

STOP MAKING THEM!!.

And we have got to learn to do with less. As well, we must try to recycle worn out things. When we were younger we carried a tremendous amount of luggage when we travelled because we were poor and much of the stuff couldn't be replaced anyway. We are not in that position now but we must learn to live in a similar way. It is too easy to just go and buy what we want.

We need to learn to exist with less.