



## City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Dorothy “Dot” Elsum

Interviewee: Dorothy “Dot” Elsum

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historian

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

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### Family life in South

**SR:** Just as I was about to press 'go' Dot said some thoughts about South Melbourne. Why don't you start from when I said to you, "Now we're going to talk about South Melbourne."

**DE:** Well if I could live the way South Melbourne used to be I'd be there tomorrow. I loved the place.

**SR:** What was it about it?

**DE:** It was a little bit like this place I'm living in now, it was very friendly. We never closed doors. There used to be a thing on 3DB called the Hit Parade and it used to be on a Sunday at six-thirty. I used to have to go to church - my mother wouldn't have anything else but religious music on - and as I walked up Tope Street to go to Park Street I could hear every one of them because everybody's door was open. I'm talking about a summer's evening of course. I lived in so many places in South Melbourne, I did write it down but I've forgotten it.

**34:15**

[pause while there was noise in the background]

**SR:** You were saying how you'd walk and everyone would have their doors open.

**DE:** Yes and you could year the Hit Parade which was pretty good, Bing Crosby.

**SR:** How long did you live in the bakehouse?

**DE:** That I cannot tell you. I lived in Moray Street, where the bakehouse is, and then I lived in Moray Street again up near York Street. There used to be a little shop on the corner and it was so dim, you'd go in there of an evening for an ice-block for a penny and she'd come waddling out (laughs) and you couldn't see her because I think she must have had a candle going or something. But anyway her ice-blocks were nice.

**SR:** Do you remember her name?

**DE:** Oh gosh no. I'm still only a child. (laughs) I lived most of my life in Tope Street, South Melbourne. I got my husband to take me there and I said, "I'll show you where I used to live, John." There was a block of land there.

**SR: The house had been knocked down?**

**DE:** Yes the house had been knocked down.

**SR: What do you remember of the house?**

**DE:** You could liken it I suppose today like a Californian bungalow where you walk straight in to the front room, the lounge room, and then you walk into Mum and Dad's bedroom, and the passage still continued, and then there was a room right across the whole of the house that sort of had a bathroom attached to one end. They had a one fire stove in, Dad loved that, he could cook, and we had a big table where we ate our meals. Then toward the back was my sister's and my room. It was only a cottage but that was enough for us. We lived there until my sister went up to Albury, her husband bought in to a dairy. She wanted Mum and Dad and I to go up there with her because she was having her first child. That was the saddest day of my life, leaving all my friends, because I was still only 15 I suppose.

### 36:58

**SR: Can I just ask in terms of getting the timing right: you were in South Melbourne by the time you were six - no before then, four?**

**DE:** You could liken it to that. And from then on I lived at --- well I went to Eastern Road State School all the time no matter which house we moved back in to, except Tope Street. There was Market Street, there was Bank Street, there was Raglan Street - I won't go on any further - quite a few streets.

**SR: Why did you move so much?**

**DE:** Well to be quite truthful I think it may have been because of the - got the rent a bit cheaper from Mr Buxton. Also Dad was very, very friendly with the auctioneer, Mr Wells, in Clarendon Street. I've got an idea - because my mother was a very, very tidy, clean woman, she truly was, if you left something on the table it was thrown straight out or burnt, that's how clean she was - Mr Wells said that Mrs Anderson was the cleanest little woman in South Melbourne - I'm just wondering whether they got Mum and Dad to move into different places to sort of tart them up to be quite crude about it.

**SR: To prepare them for sale kind of?**

**DE:** Not for sale so much as for rent at a higher rent. That's the only thing I can think of why we moved because we were God-fearing people, we did pay our rent. But if we got rent free to do the place up I think that could have been.

**SR: I'm still wanting to get the timeline right. When did you stop having the bakehouse?**

**DE:** The South Melbourne one? I'd say when I was about six or seven.

**SR: Did you then move to North Melbourne?**

**DE:** It's hard for me to - time doesn't mean that much to a child. We were only in North Melbourne a short while as I told you, Dad undercut somebody else a ha'penny on a loaf of bread and they got Kimpton to stop Dad's bread. To stop the flour.

**39:54**

**SR: Why did he leave CH Anderson bakehouse? What brought that to an end?**

**DE:** I don't know, it could have been family. There were a lot of people in his family and they all had a say as families do. I have no idea, no idea for that.

**SR: What did he do after?**

**DE:** Well he was quite elderly. He retired - well he didn't retire, the Depression retired him.

**SR: So after the C H Anderson bakehouse did he have a main job?**

**DE:** Well he used to go to different bakehouses and do spec work I suppose you'd call it. But we always managed. Mum did go to work.

**SR: What did she do?**

**DE:** She had a very, very unusual job, she was a stripper - now don't look like that - my dear old mum was a tobacco stripper. You know, the great big leaves. She would strip the leaves and then because she was so clever at it she would roll cigars and those hand-rolled cigars were quite something in those days, possibly sixpence each or something.

**SR: Where did she do that?**

**DE:** I don't know.

**SR: Was it local?**

**DE:** Yes it was one of the tobacco companies.

**SR: In South Melbourne?**

**DE:** No. Now I'm only guessing this, Burnley? Near Richmond, somewhere there. I don't know how Burnley came to my mind because I didn't think you'd ask me about that.

**41:55**

**SR: Was it common for women to be working?**

**DE:** Well I suppose it was. By this time it's around about '38, I'd be about 12 I suppose. And by this time my sister is bringing a bit of money into the house. I'd be 11 or 12. But as I say, time as a child, dates don't mean a thing.

**SR: I totally understand. You said your father, Plant, was doing spec work. What does that mean?**

**DE:** It means that if somebody wanted a good baker for a couple of days, something like that, they'd call on him, Dad was well known in the area. It was what you'd call a spec job. This happened during the Depression. People would just line up - hundreds and hundreds of them - for just a few hours' work, but he didn't have to do that because he was well known. But by this time he's getting on a bit you see and they didn't want his work.

**SR:** **Were they local bakeries that he was getting called in to or did he travel?**

**DE:** I should imagine so because if it wasn't within walking distance you didn't bother because it cost too much for the fare.

**SR:** **Do you remember any other bakeries in the area, any other names of bakers?**

**DE:** No I don't actually. But he could walk as far as Albert Park. We walked all the time.