

Timed Summary

Interview with Margaret (Peg) Enid Christian

OH 593/1

Interviewer: Karen George

Date: 12th December 2000

Note: Key words shown in bold.

START TIME	SUMMARY
Tape 1	
00.00	Introduction
0.18	Margaret speaks about her name and her family background. Although she was named Margaret, she was called Peggy and often Peg from birth. She was born in Sydney on 11.7.1920. Her mother came from a wealthy family and was a very social person who had an artistic gift that she was never able to use. Her father was the son of farm labourers from the Isle of Man . He could not go to university because of the cost and worked for the Bank of Persia . After the war he came to Australia and got married, and took up the job of managing sheep stations. He then bought his own station and that is where she grew up.
3.12	In the 1851 Census on the Isle of Man one of her ancestors was described as a veterinary surgeon but he would have been self-trained.
3.47	Peg talks about her childhood. She grew up on a property below Burrinjuck Dam in Yass ; it was a long way between town and property. She was frightened of snakes until the 1950's and was cured when she was given an anaconda. Her father mainly ran sheep with a few cattle. She had dogs and cats and then got a horse when she was six years old, and has been a fan of horses since. It was a small white pony aged 26 and Peg taught most of the neighbourhood children how to ride. Her next horse was a polo pony and when it had a foal she trained it – her name was Bidgee (from Murrumbidgee).
7.06	She was always interested in animals from a young age, both domestic and native. There was always a horse in her life.
8.12	Peg speaks about her early aim to become a vet. When she was aged 10 she decided that she wanted to be a vet after three of the sheepdog pups died of distemper. Her father thought it was a good idea but her mother thought it frightful for a girl to do a dirty job. Her mother's family always tried to persuade her to do medicine.
9.26	She explains the stages in her schooling and education. At the age of seven, Peg was sent to boarding school at Frensham , about 100 kilometres from Sydney and 200 kilometres from home. It was an all girls' school and she was there for two years until she got scarlet fever which left her with a weak heart. She then moved to another girls' boarding school at Abbotsleigh where she studied for 10 years. She played many sports and used to sneak out to ride her friend's horse.

START TIME	SUMMARY
11.30	The only disadvantage of the school was that they had no dealings with boys. The greatest advantage was to learn that she could be a leader at a time when it was taken for granted that women did not lead and university was largely a male faculty. She learned that you didn't have to be a man to be something in the world. Other women did medicine, which was considered acceptable, and those who didn't know what they wanted to do did an arts degree. The Headmistress at Abbotsleigh, Miss Everett , she expected all the girls to do something with their lives. Her family expected her to go to university, but her mother thought of it as "until you get married." She wanted Peg to be a social person and mix with the "right" people and marry the "right" man. She always maintained her ambition to be a vet.
15.30	Peg describes her studies. She went to Sydney University and stayed in a boarding college where there were lots of social activities, including three dances a year. In her year at veterinary science there were eight women and 40 men.
16.36	She started in 1938 and she was in Wagga when the war broke out in 1939. The other women in the course mainly came from country families and most of them went back to their properties to work when the men went to war. Her mother had sold their property after her father died. Everyone did something to help the war by going into the forces, working in the land army or munitions factory. It wasn't until Vietnam and her son registered as a conscientious objector that she realised that she, too, was a conscientious objector.
19.26	It was important that they did well in their courses as vets kept the country going through supporting the beef and sheep industries. The course was shortened by six months, and when they finished the course they did not have a graduation ceremony.
2107	In the first year of the course they did animal husbandry by going to stud farms and to army depots to learn about horses. It was a 5 year course but they did not look at the medical side until the 3 rd year. They did chemistry and physics, learned about drugs; they started surgery in the 5 th year which she really enjoyed. Surgery was the root to curing things.
25.20	Peg was the 12 th woman in Australia to graduate. Ann Rylah from Melbourne was a role model for her. At the time she did not realise that she was a pioneer for women. As part of her course she had a student practice on the North Shore on the edge of Sydney Harbour Bridge where she worked with another woman vet. She learned a lot at that practice.
29.50	At one time she went to a property on the North Shore that kept goats, and she helped to deliver twin kids. The practice mainly dealt with small animals such as dogs and cats, and she did most of the surgery while the other vet did most of the visiting. They had to deal with distemper and there was no vaccine at the time; tick was also another problem. In their course they were not taught how to deal with the emotional side of veterinary practice and how to deal with clients. She had to learn how to treat the people as well as the animal.
34.03	She talks of the days when it was not acceptable for men to cry in public. When an animal had to be put down and men were very emotional she learned how to support them and to tell them that it was okay to cry. If someone was not prepared to put down an animal that was suffering she threatened to report them to the RSPCA.

START TIME	SUMMARY
37.29	She would not put down an unwanted animal and tried to find homes for them. At the first practice she learned how to avoid confrontation and how to manage the working population in the hospital.
40.05	Peg explains that she married before she had completed her final exams as it was very difficult to organise a wedding in wartime. Her husband, who was also a vet, took a job with the government to run a laboratory in Alice Springs and she started her own surgery at home. She did surgery on the kitchen table. There were no private or government vets and she received phone calls from all over the Northern Territory. Her surgery was very informal and her husband used to give the anaesthetic.
42.41	She was dealing mostly with dogs and cats, and when she was given a large joey to look after, it was the first time that she had had any contact with native animals.
44.05	She did not have a very big practice so she was able to juggle the family role with her children – three boys – who were all at school. There were other working women in Alice Springs but not professionals. Most of them worked in offices or on properties. There was a strong CWA (Country Women's Association) and she also got involved with the kindergarten committee.
48.01	Peg describes the decision to move to Adelaide. When she and her husband had to give up the house they were living in she decided that she wanted to move away from the heat and her husband got a job at the IMVS in Adelaide.
49.07	She started her own practice at home and attracted clients via word of mouth. This time she operated in the bathroom and had a separate consulting room. There was very little competition as there were only four other vets working in Adelaide at the time. She did not have a nurse and she gave injections herself.
51.28	Her practice was mainly dealing with cats and dogs, but she always liked dogs better. There were two other women vets in Adelaide – Roberta Reid and Kit McCarthy . When she got her first joey to treat she rang around and the other vets did not know anything about them. She tried to rear it on cow's milk but that didn't work. After 20 years she met Brian Rich , a biochemist who was working with the vet David Schultz and they were all concerned about the food for joeys. She gave him the analysis of kangaroo milk and he made up the milk to feed the joeys. This turned into a big business for him and he makes milk for many other animals as well. It was also important to keep the joys warm when they were out of the pouch and they did this with dog electric blankets.
55.27	The Marsupial Society was started in the late 1970's, and members attended meetings in her house.
56.07	She got her first joey in the 1960's. She used to put nappies on them as she had them in the house and this later became common practice. People started to get interested in native animals, perhaps because they considered themselves Australians rather than British.
60.03	Peg explains that later she acquired wombats, hopping mice, echidna, and she explains how to handle an echidna.
	End