

# Mining the Past

## Uncovering Gwalia and Leonora

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### An Oral History Project:

Verbatim transcript of an interview with

**JOAN MCCREED**  
(19

**Childhood in Gwalia, memories of her father Donald Chisolm, Workman's  
Inspector of Mines.**

Interviewer: Crienda Fitzgerald  
Date of Interview 21/9/2006  
Transcriber: Jo Draffin



From L to R Alice Chisolm, Joan mCCreed, Enid Kittler Leaving for Gwalia Leonora centenary celebrations 1998.

**CONSENT FORM**

I, Joan McCreed (please PRINT) have read (or 'had read to me' if that would be appropriate) and understood all of the information above, and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this research on the understanding that [tick one]

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- Neither my name nor other identifying descriptions may be used in published material [ ] OR
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I reserve the right to withdraw from active participation in this project at any time and to require that all traces of my participation be removed from the project's records provided that I exercise this right within six months of the completion of my active participation.

Signature of Participant ..... Joan McCreed .....

Date..... 21.9.06 .....

Signature of Researcher..... Lenora Fitzgerald .....

Date..... 21/9/06 .....

Participant's copy [ ]

Researcher's copy [✓]

**NOTE TO READER**

Readers of this oral history should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects informal conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Gwalia/Leonora Project historians are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein: these are for the reader to judge.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

This is an interview with Joan McCreed. Crieda Fitzgerald will be speaking with Joan as part of an ARC, which is Australian Research Council, Linkage Project jointly funded by the ARC and the Leonora Shire. This interview will form part of an oral history archive being put together as part of the larger research project which will be housed at the Battye Library. Before we begin I need to make sure you understand your rights and those of the researchers in relation to this interview. Do you understand that the project historian owns copyright in the interview material but disclosure will be subject to any disclosure restrictions you impose in completing the form of consent?

**McCREED** Yes I understand.

CF This being so do we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording?

**McCREED** Yes.

CF You may terminate this interview at any stage. We hope you will speak as freely as possible knowing that neither the tapes nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority. This interview is taking place on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2006 at Joan's house in Claremont.

Joan I would like to start the interview with, I want you to tell me a little about your parents. Firstly your dad, his full name and his occupation?

**McCREED** Donald Victor Chisholm. He was Workman's Inspector of Mines in Gwalia. My mother was Winifred Fallon, she was a seamstress, tailoress, whatever and she went up to Gwalia with dad when I was three years old.

CF Where did they meet?

**McCREED** In Jarrahdale.

CF What were they doing in Jarrahdale?

**McCREED** My father was working in the sawmills. I don't really know what my mother was doing.

CF You told me off tape a little bit about your dad that he was in the First World War.

**McCREED** That's right.

CF Tell me about that? When did he enlist?

**McCREED** Fairly early in the piece I should think though he wasn't at Gallipoli. He spent a lot of time in the trenches in France, Pozieres. He was captured and escaped from the prison camp twice. The second time a Belgium family took he and his mate in and looked after them, hid them in the attic until the end of the war. I suppose that was a period of about six months that they were hidden.

CF And so when he returned from the war he went straight to Jarrahdale?

**McCREED** Straight to Jarrahdale and actually he and Roy set up Jarrahdale's first taxi service. They bought an old car and ran a taxi service. But basically they were working on the sawmills.

CF And who was Roy?

**McCREED** Roy was his younger brother.

CF Had he been to war?

**McCREED** No.

CF And what had your grandparents done? Where did they live?

**McCREED** I don't remember my grandfather I think he was dead when I was very young, even before I was born perhaps. My grandmother was Charlotte Dawes. She lived to a ripe old age here in Claremont.

CF Do you remember why the family decided to go to Gwalia – your family?

**McCREED** My father was offered a job in Gwalia. It was depression times and the saw mills had closed down and his uncle was Charlie Valentine, the Mine Engineer. Uncle Charlie offered him a job on the mines which he took and he also offered a job to Roy so they both went up there. In fact, I think, Roy was up there before Don. Roy was working on the surface somewhere but dad worked underground.

CF Do you remember anything of the journey to Gwalia?

**McCREED** No I was three. I can remember the house we lived in very clearly but I can't remember the journey.

CF Describe that house for me?

**McCREED** Well that house is still there and it's one of the ones that has been preserved fairly well. It's on the hill on the way up to the mine, about halfway up the hill. I do have a photograph of it somewhere which I took when we were up

there for the anniversary. We only lived there for a year or so I suppose and then we bought a house further down the hill near the police station.

CF Describe that house? What was it made of?

**McCREED** Which, the first one?

CF Mm.

**McCREED** Oh it was the usual corrugated iron I suppose. I think lattice around the verandas.

CF Was it a dirt floor?

**McCREED** No wooden floors, I can remember that. I can remember my mother ironing with the old Pott's steam irons in the kitchen. But no I was too young really.

CF So describe the second house? How many rooms?

**McCREED** Four rooms, front and back verandas. The front veranda was sort of semi-enclosed with lattice and shutters which dad did. And the back veranda dad built a sort of an extension on to that out on to the lawn. It was very pleasant outside but it wasn't too good inside, you know, it was hessian lining, white-washed, wood stove which was as hot as hot could be in the summer. Pipes of course, water pipes were on the surface and water used to come out boiling in the summer. If we had a bath we would have to let it cool down before we could get in.

CF Was the water drinkable?

**McCREED** Well we used to drink it. Oh no we didn't, dad used to go up to the mine with a yoke and two kerosene tins and get water from the condenser on the mine. Condensed water we drank. We used the hard water, the scheme water, for washing. And I can remember mum had these big tubs and she put caustic soda in it to soften the water because I remember I went and sat in one once which was a fairly painful experience, you know, I didn't know it had caustic soda in it. But that's how they treated the water.

CF So how often would your dad have collected that water?

**McCREED** Just about every day I would say. Oh maybe every second day, it was two kerosene tins. Do you know how big a kerosene tin is? Yes.

CF When he changed his job to be a shift boss was the water delivered or did he still collect it?

**McCREED** It certainly wasn't delivered. I suppose he still collected it, yes.

CF And did you have rainwater tanks?

**McCREED** Yes, yes.

CF How many?

**McCREED** Only the one.

CF And what about a garden – any sort of garden?

**McCREED** Oh yes we did.

CF What did you grow?

**McCREED** Oleanders mainly as a screen around the big lawn out the back. Mum used to plant annuals you know. Oh snapdragons and stocks. Oh I don't know I am not very good at flowers and gardens but pretty things you know.

CF So not vegetables?

**McCREED** Tomatoes I think. Probably only tomatoes. I can't remember anything else.

CF Did you have chooks?

**McCREED** Oh yes we had chooks. Yes ask Anne<sup>1</sup> about the chooks.

CF Okay. How many would there have been?

**McCREED** Oh I don't know, maybe a dozen or so and a big wild old rooster. Yes.

CF And you've got, in your diagram, you've got Clarke's then Robertson's sort of in front of you and the police station in front of them.

**McCREED** Yes we're all side by side along the road.

CF What was that like living so close to the police station? Were there ever any problems?

**McCREED** No, not that I could remember. We knew that that building out the back was the gaol but we kids used to just play in that half the time, you know.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne is Joan's daughter

CF           Who was the policeman in Gwalia?

**McCREED**   Oh they kept changing. I can remember Babcock because he had a daughter Marjory who went to school there for a while you know and I used to play with her. I can't remember any others, I can't remember the names.

CF           Was food or groceries – were they delivered to home?

**McCREED**   Meat certainly wasn't. I used to go down to the butcher shop every morning and ask for half a pound of your best rump steak for dad's breakfast. He would have steak and eggs for breakfast every morning. Can you believe? Food I can't remember. I think it might have been delivered from the Co-op.

CF           Milk?

**McCREED**   I think we probably had powdered milk.

CF           So you didn't keep a goat?

**McCREED**   No, no. Some people did. Goats were kept there. Oh I know, Charlie Valentine, his family had a cow or cows and we used to go up to their place and collect a...

CF           Billy?

**McCREED**   ...billy of milk and take it home. Yes, of course.

CF           So where did Charlie live?

**McCREED**   He lived in a stone house by itself sort of up on the hill.

CF           The one that's still standing?

**McCREED**   Yes, yes.

CF           And you said that there was a dip behind it, were there stables behind it?

**McCREED**   There was certainly that's where the cow or cows were. I don't know about any other animals. There probably were because they used horses down the mine.

CF           Mm. So the horses weren't kept behind his house?

**McCREED**   They may have been. They may have been.

CF           You said that you went underground – how old were you when you went down there?

**McCREED**   In my early twenties probably. Clarry came down too. But dad often, well not often, he occasionally used to take people, you know, VIPs if they came there he'd give them an escorted tour underground. So one day he said, you know, "Would you and Clarry like to come?" Of course we said, "Yes, yes." I had to wear trousers tucked into big long socks to keep the cockroaches out because with the horses down underground the place was alive with cockroaches from the stables. I liked being underground, apart from the cockroaches it was good, it was I don't know just different you know seeing how the stopes, worked into the stopes and brought the ore out.

CF           How did you go underground?

**McCREED**   In the skip. You know the skips?

CF Describe getting into that for me? What was that like?

**McCREED** Well the skip was a... what would you call it?

CF I've seen a picture of it so...

**McCREED** Yes well it was metal of course and they'd put a... when it was bringing the ore up it would be empty you know and filled with ore but when people were going down in it they had sort of a ladder arrangement that they put in it and you sat on that ladder, it made sort of little seats all the way down. Yes that was the skip.

CF So were you right in underneath or were you exposed on top?

**McCREED** No, no I was exposed on top.

CF So your head was exposed?

**McCREED** My head was exposed. I was told to keep it down but you know it was better than being down inside I thought.

CF What did it smell like underground?

**McCREED** Oh damp, and not an unpleasant smell. I really can't describe it, sorry.

CF That's all right. Did you wear helmets?

**McCREED** Yes with a light on the front, mm. Carbide, carbide lamps.

CF Was it considered unlucky to have women underground?

**McCREED** Not as far as I know. Nobody said anything about it but I don't think very many women ever went underground.

CF And what did your dad talk about when you went? And do you remember what level you went to?

**McCREED** No I don't. But it was a level they were working on, you know, it was a working level but I can't remember where.

CF So you saw men actually working?

**McCREED** Yes, yes.

CF What were they doing – drilling or shovelling?

**McCREED** Shovelling. I never actually saw anyone drilling.

CF So shovelling the ore into...

**McCREED** Into containers, you know, that would then be pulled along by the horses.

CF And you saw horses underground?

**McCREED** Yes, yes. They were blind you know when they brought them up, they couldn't see after all those years. They'd bring them up every now and again for a spell but they'd be blind.

CF Did they have lights on them, the horses?

**McCREED** Can't remember.

CF You said off tape that you were nervous about coming back up. Why was that?

**McCREED** Well in earlier times two men had been tipped from the skip into the ore crusher, the cracker as they called it. The skip was operated by a winder driver with a system of signals, bells, so many bells, and on this occasion either the winder driver had made a mistake or dozed off but instead of stopping at the surface to let these men out they were taken right up the top and tipped in to the crusher. I was absolutely terrified that this was going to happen to me. I was quite happy going down and I was very happy down there but I was very very nervous coming up. Yes, very nervous.

CF You said earlier that you got the best rump steak for your father for breakfast every morning.

**McCREED** Yes.

CF Was that when he was working as an underground miner?

**McCREED** Yes, yes.

CF And how long did he stay in that job and I can check this so it's okay?

**McCREED** Quite a while. He was a shift boss for many years.

CF Underground shift boss.

**McCREED** Underground shift boss for many years.

CF Did he talk about his work underground?

**McCREED** Very little.

CF And was he ever a machine miner?

**McCREED** No, no.

CF So do you know what he did underground?

**McCREED** No I don't .

CF When your dad began working as a shift boss how old were you then?

**McCREED** Quite young. I think he got to be shift boss fairly quickly, I don't know.

CF Okay. Did he ever talk about what the conditions were like underground?

**McCREED** No.

CF About dust?

**McCREED** No, not that I remember.

CF And was he examined, medically examined regularly?

**McCREED** I couldn't tell you that.

CF No it's fine, it's fine. Joan what age were you when you began school?

**McCREED** Well I would have been five. The year I turned six I guess.

CF And are there other children in your family? You one.

**McCREED** No I am an only child.

CF Only child. Who was your first teacher?

**McCREED** I think it was Amy King or Amy Wallace. Amy Wallace, Amy King, there were two of them there, I am not sure which was first.

CF And this was at the Gwalia State School?

**McCREED** Yes, yes.

CF How did you get to school?

**McCREED** Walked. It was not far.

CF Could you come home for lunch?

**McCREED** Yes.

CF Did you?

**McCREED** Not always. I can remember having lunch at school.

CF           What games did you play at school as young girls - what games did you play?

**McCREED**   Marbles and, oh that hopping game.

CF           Hopscotch?

**McCREED**   Hopscotch, yes you know where one...

CF           Three and then two?

**McCREED**   Yes, yes that one.

CF           Skipping?

**McCREED**   Skipping, yes, and ball games, you know, bouncing games. Then we used to play rounders against Leonora State School sometimes and that was a big day when we played Leonora at rounders.

CF           What were relationships like between Leonora and Gwalia?

**McCREED**   Oh very much rivalry. You know not only at school but football and everything you know. There was great rivalry between the two.

CF           Did you ever go into Leonora?

**McCREED**   Oh often.

CF           Often. What for?

**McCREED** Oh to the dentist which isn't a happy memory. Oh we'd catch the bus in occasionally and shop.

CF So there was a bus?

**McCREED** There was a bus. At one stage there was a bus, yes. But quite often I would walk into Leonora because it was only about two miles.

CF On your own?

**McCREED** Yes. I can remember walking into the dentist on my own. It's a wonder I didn't take off half way. No.

CF And what about did you have a bicycle?

**McCREED** I was offered a bicycle once when I was quite young if I would take some cod liver, and I didn't take the cod liver oil so I never got the bike.

CF And what was the cod liver oil for?

**McCREED** Oh I don't know just a general...

CF Tonic.

**McCREED** ...tonic. Or I might have been sick, I don't know. Yes I think I probably was sick, I'd had measles and I'd had this and that and I probably needed building up. But there was no way I was going to have cod liver oil even it meant a bike.

CF I've talked to a lot of boys who grew up and they spent a lot of their time in the bush shooting from a very young age. What did girls do?

**McCREED** Well you mean in our leisure time?

CF Mm, leisure time.

**McCREED** Well I don't know. I would have been too young to have done anything very much before I went away to school. I mean certainly shooting. Were the boys shooting as young as that – under 12? Oh I didn't know that.

CF You said off tape you were searching for an Afghan...

**McCREED** Mosque.

CF ...Mosque.

**McCREED** Yes we often went into the bush. We often went on picnics in to the bush and we used to go to the cemetery that was a great thing with us kids, we'd go to the cemetery. And look for little bits of old plates and things in the rubbish tip nearby. We'd climb Mt Leonora at least once a month I would say and, you know, we had special places there, little caves and things either side.

CF Who were your friends?

**McCREED** Oh well I had my cousins for a start, my three cousins. They were a bit younger than me but...

CF What were their names?

**McCREED** Enid, Alison, Eileen Chisolm. And I can show you a very funny photograph of us later on if you like. Yes. Oh I had various friends. I had Doris... oh golly I can't think of her name. I had Phyllis, anyway, Phyllis Gray.

CF Any Italian friends?

**McCREED** Yes that's Doris, I can't think of her other name. Tampolini. Doris Tampolini. The Varischetti's, Stella and Mary Varischetti. No I can't... won't come to me.

CF Were you aware of quite a big ethnic population in Leonora?

**McCREED** In Leonora?

CF Gwalia.

**McCREED** In Gwalia. Yes but it was just seemed the normal way of things to us, you know. Never really thought about it.

CF So was there any prejudice?

**McCREED** I would say not. I would say not. Certainly not among the children and I doubt among the adults. I mean dad's friend was an Italian.

CF What was his name? Grazzioli.

**McCREED** Angelo Grazzioli. They called him Mons. I think probably because his name... he was in the war and you know the Angel of Mons and he was Angelo and so he was always called Mons, Mons Grazzioli. He and dad and Bertie Harris who was the mine accountant, who was, you know, up there and somebody else used to play cards every Saturday afternoon at our place they'd play Euchre. So you know there was no, certainly there was no prejudice against Mons. I learnt. I could play Euchre practically before I could read I think. I knew all about Euchre.

CF            When you said that quite often you would go for picnics, the girls.

**McCREED**    Mm.

CF            What would you take on those picnics? Would you take food?

**McCREED**    Oh yes, yes we'd take sandwiches or whatever we could... maybe fruit, I don't know.

CF            Would you make billy tea?

**McCREED**    No I don't think so. I don't think so. We probably just took water or something like that.

CF            And how long would you go for?

**McCREED**    Oh sometimes we'd go all day you know we'd leave in the morning and get home just before dark. It was very silly but sometimes we used to go down some of the old mine shafts you know round the back. Not very far down but you know it was a sort of a challenge you know. It was very silly. If my children were doing it I would have a fit. But we used to do that.

CF            Did you play around the mine itself?

**McCREED**    No, no. Well there was nowhere there except the swimming pool of course that was on the mine grounds. Funny little swimming pool.

CF            Just going back to school now. Was there any particular teacher who made an impression on you at school?

**McCREED** Alan Wauchope certainly did because he gave me a lot of help and you know I would never have gone away to school if he hadn't sort of singled me out and helped me.

CF What did he do?

**McCREED** Well he gave me special coaching for the scholarship class you know for the scholarship exam. I remember going to his house every Saturday afternoon and he had sets of the old papers you know and we'd go through them and I'd do all those. Also you know towards the end I would be going several afternoons a week after school to his house. He helped me enormously.

CF So you got accepted to Perth Mod.?

**McCREED** Mm.

CF Why didn't you go?

**McCREED** Well it was war time and I suppose my parents didn't want me so far away in the war. But you know I had all the other privileges, I had you know travel allowances and all my books were paid and living away from home allowance. It was just I didn't go to Mod. I went to Eastern Goldfields High instead of Perth Mod.

CF Did you know about Perth Mod.?

**McCREED** Oh yes.

CF What? What did you know then?

**McCREED** Well I knew it was a very special school then and you had to be pretty good to get in you know they didn't take just anybody. So I thought I was pretty smart to have got the chance. But really when I got to Eastern Goldfields High School in Kalgoorlie I thought Kalgoorlie was you know a big metropolis. I'd never seen so many kids in my life as I saw at the high school the first day I went you know. Well you've seen what the photo of what our school was. Yes. And I loved it, I just loved being at school down there.

CF            Why?

**McCREED** Well I liked all the other children, I liked the sport. I was a bit sad being away from home but you know. I boarded with various people down in Kalgoorlie.

CF            What age were you when you went away?

**McCREED** Twelve. It was for secondary schooling.

CF            Yes. Your parents went up... during the Depression your dad had lost his job.

**McCREED** Mm.

CF            Were they ever struggling for money? Did you ever feel there was a problem with money?

**McCREED** Not really but I do know that if I hadn't got that scholarship I would never have gone away to school, they couldn't have afforded it. But I mean we had plenty to eat and you know went away on holidays and things like that but I am sure they could never have afforded to send me away to school.

CF           Where did you go on holidays?

**McCREED**   To Claremont, just down there.

CF           And where did you stay?

**McCREED**   We stayed with my grandmother in Warwick Street and my great aunt - Charlie Valentine's wife - Sarah, she was just round the corner in Agate Road. And so we always stayed round here and I learnt to swim down at Claremont Baths which were down there. I loved it.

CF           Would your dad come with you?

**McCREED**   Oh yes we all came.

CF           The whole family?

**McCREED**   Yes, yes.

CF           For how long?

**McCREED**   It was probably two weeks I think. I think that's what holidays were in those times.

CF           And mainly summer?

**McCREED**   Yes always summer. Mm.

CF           Was there a concern about the heat in Gwalia or in the Goldfields?

**McCREED** We just accepted it. In fact, I think in some ways we were very proud of it because we were very upset that Marble Bar reckoned they were hotter than we were you know. I know my mother used to play tennis in temperatures like 114 (in the old scale you know), they'd still go down and play tennis down the courts behind the hotel.

CF           The hotel, yes.

**McCREED** So people more or less ignored it I think you know. Perhaps sometimes in the real midday heat we'd sort of lie down on the floor and have a little sleep. You couldn't lie on a bed because that was too hot but on lino you know it was just a little bit cooler.

CF           And did you sleep outdoors?

**McCREED** In summer always. Always out on the lawn.

CF           On a bed or just ?

**McCREED** On a bed, yes. Take beds out there.

CF           Parents and children, your parents too?

**McCREED** Yes, yes. Yes.

CF           You said that you remember some people coming to Gwalia during the war, can you talk a little bit about that - what you know about it?

**McCREED** I can't remember the actual people but I remember they were from Perth and they came up there because of the war. I suppose they saw it as a safe place or safer place and they bought an old house behind the betting shop,

the SP betting shop across the road from the hotel and they painted it all white and they called it 'La Hacienda'. We had a bit of a laugh about it actually because it was a bit weird. But I can't remember anything about the people or who they were.

CF Did they work or you can't remember?

**McCREED** They certainly didn't work up there. I sort of... you know we were saying about people with posh voices.<sup>2</sup> I sort of seem to remember that these were sort of upper class type people you know. But I can't really remember.

CF But Gwalia people were amused by that?

**McCREED** Oh yes, yes, they thought it was a great joke.

CF What sort of shopping facilities were there in Gwalia?

**McCREED** Well there was the co-operative, the Co-op Store and the Co-op Butchers right next-door. Oh there was the Block. Down at the Block another grocery, drapery. Later on there was Mazza's opened a shop. Oh how would I describe it? Sort of across the road from the church on the main road going into Leonora.

CF More central?

**McCREED** More central, yes.

CF Other people have described that shop as very modern in a way, did you find that? When you think back on it now.

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<sup>2</sup> See interview with Cyril Linto and Maureen Biggs.

**McCREED** No it didn't make much impression on me either way I don't think.

CF And how important was the train arrival in Gwalia?

**McCREED** Oh the train arrival was the highlight of our lives you know. Everyone would go down to the station regardless... well regardless of whether you were meeting anybody often just to see who was coming and who wasn't. But the train also brought the mail and the papers. And we'd go down to the station and wait there until you know we thought it was time that the papers would have arrived at the paper shop and we'd go and get our papers. By that time the mail would be sorted and we could go and pick up mail. But going down to the meet the train was a real social occasion you know. As children we would have a bit of money to spend at the shops you know when we were getting the papers, get some lollies.

CF Would the shops have stayed open even if... depending on... just for the train coming in?<sup>3</sup>

**McCREED** Oh yes yes I would think so.

CF So it didn't matter what time it came in really?

**McCREED** No, it usually came in six, seven something like that, I think.

CF PM.

**McCREED** PM, mm. It would leave Kalgoorlie mind you about 9 o'clock in the morning. It took a long, long time to get there especially with the stop at Kookynie that prolonged it quite considerably.

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<sup>3</sup> See also interview with Harry and Vic Mazza.

CF           Why was that?

**McCREED**   Well the train crew would get off and all the male passengers would get off and they'd go across to the Kookynie Hotel. After about, oh half an hour or more I suppose, the engine driver and the guard would come back and they'd toot, toot, toot. No response from the hotel and you know this would go on for a while and then somebody might actually go over and get the passengers and bring them back. But nearly all those men – I was coming back from school of course – and they would bring me back a bottle of lemonade or something you know for waiting because I'd been waiting in the train. But that happened quite regularly those stops at Kookynie. It was a very popular drinking place.

CF           Did women go and drink?

**McCREED**   I can't recall it. They may have done but I certainly didn't I used to just sit in the train you know. But they may have done.

CF           And when you went to Kalgoorlie from the age of 12 did you travel alone?

**McCREED**   Yes, yes.

CF           There and back?

**McCREED**   There and back. Never any problems. Most people were so kind you know.

CF           What facilities were there on the train? Were there drinks?

**McCREED**   I have an idea there were water bags. That might be wrong, yes.

CF            There was usually a water bag with a cup.

**McCREED**    That's right, yes.

CF            Was that inside or outside? Like hanging on the outside or the inside?

**McCREED**    I think it must have been on the outside. I don't really know.

CF            And why was it called the Mulga Express?

**McCREED**    Well that is mulga country, that's the timber, the mulga.

CF            So that was just...

**McCREED**    That was just a local name for it, the Mulga Express. It wasn't the official name I am sure.

CF            And you said in your form that you filled in that the train stopped often for wildflower picking.

**McCREED**    Oh yes, yes.

CF            Whereabouts?

**McCREED**    Well wherever we happened to see wildflowers you know. If the crew saw a good patch of wildflowers somewhere they'd stop and let us off. This particularly applied to Sturt peas because Sturt peas weren't... very well you didn't see them all that often, not in big patches so if ever they saw a big patch of Sturt peas they would stop for us and we'd get out and pick them.

CF           And what would people do with them then?

**McCREED**   Take them home or wherever we were going to Gwalia I suppose.  
Put them in a bit of water.

CF           You said you can still remember all the places along the train.

**McCREED**   Oh yes.

CF           Tell me them now?

**McCREED**   Well I don't know whether I'd get them in the right order.

CF           Doesn't matter.

**McCREED**   Broad Arrow, Bardoc, Comet Vale, Goongarrie, Menzies. Oh now  
well after Menzies, Kookynie, Malcolm. I've probably missed a couple.

CF           And would the train have stopped at all those places?

**McCREED**   Yes, oh yes. Some of them only had two or three houses even in  
those days only had two or three houses. They were ghost towns then. But there  
were still people living in those houses and travelling on the train. It always  
stopped, always.

CF           It's any wonder it took so long.

**McCREED**   Oh yes.

CF           But Kookynie was the only place where they had got off and had a  
beer?

**McCREED** Oh Menzies, we always stopped for quite a while at Menzies because they had refreshment rooms on the station there. Menzies was a great big stone station, quite impressive. And Mrs Butcher there, Mrs Butcher was in charge of the refreshment rooms and she used to make coffee rolls. We always stopped at Menzies and had cups of tea and coffee rolls from Mrs Butcher.

CF                What's a coffee roll?

**McCREED** It's well I don't know why they call them coffee rolls, they were just like scones but sort of a funny shape. I don't know, they didn't seem remotely connected to coffee perhaps they were just things that you had when you were drinking coffee, I don't know.

CF                That description of wildflowers, did you go on the Woodline picnics as a child?

**McCREED** Yes I did, I think, yes. I can't remember much about it but I remember the Woodline. I remember the name Woodline picnics. I am sure I've been on a Woodline picnic.

CF                You would have possibly got on the little train and sat on top.

**McCREED** Yes, and one of the engines was called 'KEN'.

CF                Were they also during wildflower season, those picnics if you can remember?

**McCREED** No I can't remember.

CF                Did your own family go on picnics to look at wildflowers?

**McCREED** I don't know. They used to go on picnics but whether they were looking at wildflowers I don't know. Percy Valentine was one of the only ones up there who had a car an old Marquette. The old Marquette – we used to pile into that and go on picnics. I have got some old photographs of them sitting around on rocks with bottles of beer or bottles of something.

CF Was this to Malcolm Dam or where would they have gone?

**McCREED** Probably, yes they probably would have gone to Malcolm Dam. Yes.

CF You can't remember exactly.

**McCREED** Can't remember, no.

CF Well Malcolm Dam was a particular...

**McCREED** Yes.

CF Did kids ever go out to the stations?

**McCREED** Oh no I wouldn't think so, not the Gwalia kids anyway. I've been to a few of them, a few of the stations but I don't think many of them did and I didn't go all that often probably three or four times. We used to go out to Clover Downs I remember. Oh I can't remember.

CF As a child or as an adult?

**McCREED** As a child.

CF           What for, do you know?

**McCREED**   I don't know. Mainly I used to go out with the Valentines, you know. Well they were the only ones who had a car in our little group.

CF           When did your parents get a car?

**McCREED**   Well dad had one straight after the war when he started his taxi business in Jarrahdale but he never had one in Gwalia. They never had a car when I come to think of it. They never had a car.

CF           But he was Workman's Inspector?

**McCREED**   Yes that was a government car and it was from Kalgoorlie, it wasn't his personal conveyance. A government inspector used to come and bring it up from Kalgoorlie and then they would go off. They covered a huge area, Cue, Meekatharra, oh Sandstone, Wiluna, all that area. Though when dad was first appointed he was told that you know... He had an office or something in Leonora and he had a pushbike, it was a pushbike in the office that was his conveyance. But it turned out that you know he went with the Kalgoorlie inspector.

CF           But was his job initially just the mines around Leonora Gwalia?

**McCREED**   Oh no no it always entailed the whole district.

CF           And how often would he go out to inspect them?

**McCREED**   Oh every couple of months I would say. Well they would go to different places you know. I doubt that they would do the whole thing in one trip. Maybe they did, I don't know but it was an enormous area.

CF And was he a member of a union?

**McCREED** I don't think so. I don't really know. I never heard him talk about it.

CF So you think he probably was a member because he was elected as Workman's Inspector?

**McCREED** I would say so.

CF Yes, yes. So where was his office for that?

**McCREED** Well it was somewhere in Leonora near the courthouse, I think, or the, yes I think near the courthouse in Leonora. It was probably just a room you know that they...

CF And he would cycle there and back?

**McCREED** No he waited home until the bloke came up from Kalgoorlie. He'd just look after the Gwalia mine until they set off on their safari to the other places. I think he had a pretty easy job. I think he loved it you know because he liked going out to all these other places. They also visited all the old prospectors on the way and sometimes camped overnight with them and he loved that part of it.

CF You haven't talked much about your mum – what did she do for leisure time? You said that she played tennis a lot.

**McCREED** A lot, yes. Well I can remember sometimes we had card evenings. There was a group of people they used to play cards at each others houses in rotation. There was always a great fuss about preparing cakes and you know supper. Supper was a big, big deal. I think it rather overwhelmed mum because she wasn't a very social type of person and she wasn't that mad keen on cooking

either. You know it was always a great strain when we had to have cards at our place. I don't know what else she did.

CF Were there any dances or balls that she was involved in?

**McCREED** Oh yes. Oh no she wouldn't be involved in them, no.

CF She wouldn't have helped organise them?

**McCREED** No, no, she wasn't into that sort of thing.

CF Did the family listen to the radio?

**McCREED** Isn't that awful I don't know. Yes.

CF No I just wondered whether she listened to serials on the radio, whether you did?

**McCREED** No she read a lot, she read lots and lots of books. I don't know where she got them from. I don't know but she always seemed to have a book.

CF Did you listen to the radio as a child?

**McCREED** The Argonauts. I don't know where that was in Gwalia or when I was in Kalgoorlie.

CF No I was wondering if she listened to Blue Hills?

**McCREED** She may have done. I can't remember.

CF Apart from tennis what was she interested in?

**McCREED** I don't know, she was a fairly reclusive sort of woman you know. Eileen Barden I think was her main friend. And if Eileen hadn't made a point of coming down hill every couple of days to see mum she never would have bothered with that even. Eileen used to bring down a cold bottle of beer and they'd sit there and drink the beer and then Eileen would walk up the hill and home again you know. But I don't know, she wasn't a very outgoing type mum.

CF Did your family go up to the Barden's?

**McCREED** Oh yes occasionally. Yes. No not as a family. I don't think dad every did really. Mum and I used to go up there sometimes but usually it was Eileen coming down to us. It was a bit hard to get mum to go out anywhere except to go and play tennis.

CF You said that you had lots of cousins and family around so did you ever feel lonely as an only child?

**McCREED** No, no I rather liked it because I used to get spoilt rotten at home and I had plenty of company.

CF And what sport did you play in Gwalia itself?

**McCREED** I actually started playing tennis there quite young because I used to go down and watch mum. I'd sit there and watch and watch and watch. Eventually she drew a tennis court in our backyard and strung up something for a net and let me, you know, play there for a while. Then I got to the stage where if they were one short I was actually able to go and join in a proper game of tennis. That's about the only sport I played except at school when you know the school had funny little games rounders and stuff.

CF But you said you won, you were very good at sport later.

**McCREED** I was. Tennis and badminton I had State titles. I was sport mad, I was playing hockey and I was in the very first water ballet in Kalgoorlie and all sorts of funny things. If anything was going I was in it, yes.

CF This is at Eastern Goldfields?

**McCREED** Yes, yes.

CF When you finished school, high school, the Eastern Goldfields, you came back to Gwalia.

**McCREED** As a monitor, yes.

CF What was it like coming back as a monitor there?

**McCREED** Oh it was very strange. It was very strange. I had my little Valentine cousins in my class trying to you know give them spelling lessons or something which was a bit of a riot because they took absolutely no notice whatsoever of me. I quite enjoyed it because mainly - I took a few little classes - but mainly I was making tea and you know I was just a supernumerary member of the staff. But then when this other poor girl down in Menzies got carted off they transferred me to Menzies. There I actually was teaching or trying to teach to the best of my ability. It was just absolutely hopeless because half my class couldn't speak English, the other half were aborigines. It was very unfair on those kids really was. They bumped up my pay; I wasn't getting monitor's pay anymore I was getting... I don't know how that happened but I was getting quite good pay compared to a monitor but I probably would have stayed in teaching if I hadn't gone to Menzies. But I thought now here I am a monitor and I can get out. If I go down to college for two years I am bonded and they can send me to a post like

this and I can't get out. So I got out and I went. Actually I was offered job in Kalgoorlie by one of the tennis clubs. They got me a job in an office and I went to night school and did accountancy and stuff like that.

CF Did you want to be a teacher?

**McCREED** Yes I did. And I really loved trying to teach these kids but I just felt that I was such a failure you know I did my best. In fact later on I went into kindergarten teaching when we were in Carnarvon because they didn't have a kindergarten teacher and I took that over as a completely untrained person and I just loved that. I would have loved teaching but Menzies frightened me, you know, I thought I could be stuck in a place like this forever you know for years, two years, I could have been stuck in a place like that.

CF So you were sent there to teach with... what training did you have?

**McCREED** None, none. I was fresh out of high school and a few months monitoring in Gwalia. Fresh out of high school. And the head teacher there was a Mr Robinson, he tried to help me you know. But we were only the two of us there and he had all the bigger children and I had the littleys.

CF Where did these kids who couldn't speak English where were their parents?

**McCREED** They were fettlers, railway fettlers and they were from Europe you know after the war. And they had very basic accommodation you know in these fettler's camps.

CF Was there an influx of post war migrants to Gwalia?

**McCREED** I really don't know.

CF            You weren't aware of it when you were monitor at the school there?

**McCREED**    No, no.

CF            Do you remember anything happening, any privations during the war or any particular differences in the war while you were living Gwalia?

**McCREED**    Not while I was in Gwalia. It was mainly in Kalgoorlie, you know, but not in Gwalia. I think mum used to save up all the coupons and everything for when I came home on the holidays. As I told you I was spoilt. We always had butter and everything you know because she used to save all the coupons for me. And clothing coupons and everything. I was the envy of half the kids that I knew down in Kalgoorlie because I had all these clothing coupons.

CF            You said you really loved Eastern Goldfields School, you loved that school.

**McCREED**    Yes, yes.

CF            Did you feel prepared? Could you cope with all the work?

**McCREED**    Oh yes, yes. Mind you I should have worked a lot harder than I did but I just enjoyed all the company and the sports and the social activity you know which I'd never had in Gwalia. I wasn't nearly so keen on studying as I was when I was in Gwalia, let's put it that way. Oh but I could cope all right.

CF            Yes. And what year did you get to?

**McCREED**    Oh I completed high school, matriculated.

CF            You said you sort of wanted to go teaching. Was there any thought that you might go to university?

**McCREED**   No, we couldn't have afforded it. I am sure we couldn't of afforded it so it was never mentioned.

CF            And there was no encouragement for you to get a scholarship?

**McCREED**   No because I probably didn't warrant it at that stage. I'd wasted you know I hadn't worked all that hard. I just worked hard enough to get through and that was all in that high school I'm sorry to say.

CF            What were your parents - like both your mum and your dad, what were their views on education for girls?

**McCREED**   That I don't really know. They were very happy that I could go away to school I know that. Not that they wanted to get rid of me but you know they were very happy that I had that opportunity. And they were very proud of the fact that I you know got out like that. But I don't know how they really felt about it.

CF            You were saying they were proud of you that you'd got out. Did Gwalia feel like that?

**McCREED**   Not to me it didn't but they must have realised that if I'd stayed there I wouldn't have had much of a life. I think they realise that. I think they realised I had much better opportunities if I moved out.

CF            And when you came back for holidays, back home to Gwalia did you catch up with your friends?

**McCREED** Yes I did. I felt a little bit of an outsider, well I suppose I was looked on as an outsider but no some friends I kept. I tried to fit in with everybody as much as I could but there was just that little bit of you know that it wasn't quite the way it was before.

CF Was it because you were related to hierarchy in the mine?

**McCREED** I don't think so. I don't think so because I was talking to... actually when we were up in Gwalia for that anniversary I was talking to Kenny Williams who wrote that book, you know, and Ken didn't even realise we were related to the Valentines. He didn't realise it so most probably nobody realised it you know everybody just sort of mixed in with everybody else.

CF Yes. So there wasn't... you didn't feel there was any distinction, class distinction?

**McCREED** I don't think so. I don't know about the adults but certainly among the children I don't think there were, you know, my age group I don't think there was.

CF Were there any big accidents on the mine when you were there or growing up there?

**McCREED** Oh yes, yes.

CF What happened?

**McCREED** Well I don't know you just hear the mine hooter sounding, and when the hooter sounded you knew that there was something had happened on the mine. Of course the one I remember most was Angelo Mons Grazzioli because

that upset dad so much. The Sons of Gwalia had a terrible safety record, dreadful. Absolutely awful. Yes.

CF           What happened with Angelo?

**McCREED**   Well as far as I remember he was working down underground and he was just crushed to death by the skip coming down on him.

CF           And your dad was he Workman's Inspector then?

**McCREED**   Yes, yes. So he felt it very very badly. In both senses because it was his friend and because he was responsible for safety, well not responsible but he should have... well I don't know he took it very badly.

CF           What was living where you lived in Gwalia was it noisy? Was the mine noisy?

**McCREED**   No. No. Well maybe it's like living near a railway or something you get so that you don't hear it. I can remember... no when... not living in the house. I can sort of remember the mine noises when I used to walk up to the mine, take dad's crib up in the evenings sometimes you know when he was on afternoon shift. You could hear the mine thumping away then. But I don't remember it in the house, at home.

CF           You weren't conscious of it?

**McCREED**   I wasn't conscious of it.

CF           And were there hooters that told people about shift changes?

**McCREED** Yes I think so. Yes there must have been. I just can't remember, there must have been.

CF When you look back on growing up in Gwalia, how would you describe your childhood at that time?

**McCREED** Well it was very... I had a lot of freedom, you know I could go anywhere and do anything virtually. As long as I was home before dark nobody worried where I was or what I was doing. I had a lot of freedom, I had a lot of friends, and I liked being at school. I liked school. Oh I was a very happy child, very happy.

CF Joan just tell me do you have any memories of Afghans in the area?

**McCREED** I knew there were Afghans there and I saw some but I don't really remember very much about it.

CF But you said they came and sold - hawking?

**McCREED** Yes, yes.

CF Do you know what they sold?

**McCREED** No I don't but I seem to remember that they were different sort of things, glittery things, and showy things, and you know not the normal old stuff that we got down at the Co-op store.

CF And were there any aboriginal people... you've told me about aboriginal kids in Menzies what about aboriginal people in Leonora or Gwalia?

**McCREED** No I don't remember. The only memory I have of the aborigines is that they would come round to our house and sell clothes props and they'd ask for tea and sugar. "Gibbit tea, gibbit sugar" and that's all I remember. I don't remember any children specifically.

CF And did you follow football? Did the family go to football matches?

**McCREED** I used to go. Mum and dad didn't.

CF They didn't go?

**McCREED** No, no

CF Who did you barrack for?

**McCREED** Gwalia of course. Goodness me.

CF And were they.. I mean someone has said the supporters were quite vocal.

**McCREED** Vocal.

CF Did you feel that?

**McCREED** No, I don't know. Of course you shouted. Well everybody does at football matches don't they.

CF Did you as a Gwalia person, did you feel different? What separated you from a Leonora person?

**McCREED** That's hard.

CF            Sorry, yes it is. It's a bit nebulous really.

**McCREED**    I think it was a connection with the mine, I think that's probably what it was. We were mining people and they weren't.

CF            And what were they?

**McCREED**    They were, well I don't know they were sort of town people and pastoralists and probably on a higher social level than us in some ways. Maybe. I don't really know. Didn't think about them much we just sort of... oh they're just Leonora people you know. But yes I think they were their houses were probably better and... can't get it.

CF            Would you have gone to the pictures in Gwalia or Leonora?

**McCREED**    Oh Gwalia regularly, every Saturday night, never missed, indoor or out.

CF            And where was it indoor...

**McCREED**    Indoor in winter and outdoor in the deckchairs in summer. Indoor in the deck chairs in winter. Yes.

CF            Do you remember any film that you saw?

**McCREED**    No, no I don't remember any films. I remember that there was always a fire brigade man in uniform standing to attention inside the door. The local volunteer, Leonora Fire Brigade.

CF            Why?

**McCREED** I don't know they just attended the picture shows probably to save us all if they had a big fire. But I can particularly remember Kenny Robertson in his fireman's uniform standing proudly you know by the door of the picture show.

CF And was there a woman who played the piano?

**McCREED** Don't know, I don't know.

CF Okay.

**McCREED** No, but I remember not a picture show but a big concert they had at the outdoor picture show venue once and Joycee Tedge got up and sang "In My Sweet Little Alice Blue Gown", and I thought she was the prettiest loveliest little girl I had ever seen. I really envied Joycee because she has a rather nice voice and she was so pretty. She sang In My Sweet Little Alice Blue Gown. I don't know if you've come up against Joyce in your travels?

CF No.

**McCREED** No the Tedge girls they were all very nice looking. Lovely looking family.

CF Were there those sorts of occasions where people performed?

**McCREED** Well that's the only one that I can remember.

CF You can't remember a band or?

**McCREED** No, no.

CF            Okay thanks.

The mine closed as you know in '63 but your dad had left before then.

**McCREED**    Yes in about '62 he left.

CF            Sixty-two. Was he aware that the mine was going to close?

**McCREED**    Oh yes I think so. Maybe not. He left really to be with us in Carnarvon but I don't think it was any shock to him when the mine closed.

CF            And when you went back after the mine had closed how did Gwalia seem? What was it like?

**McCREED**    Well we went back for the anniversary celebrations and I was just appalled at what has happened to Gwalia. It's nothing like the Gwalia we knew, the buildings have been put down haphazardly all over the place and they've... I don't know I suppose they had to make it a tourist attraction. And maybe Mrs Patroni's was a brothel but I wasn't really aware of that she was a very straight-laced sort of woman Mrs Patroni. You know she was well respected and things like that just that really really upset me. I never want to go back there again. And yet that celebration up there was wonderful, the Leonora Shire oh they just did an incredible job, you know, we had our tents all on the Leonora Oval.

END OF INTERVIEW