

Shire of Irwin
Oral History Programme

Transcript of Interview

SISTERS GEMMA, VIANNEY AND ANITA



Dominican Ladies' College, Dongara

Interviewer	Trish Parker
Transcriber	Trish Parker
Date of Interview	7 May 2015
Duration	61 minutes

Summary of Transcript

Sister Vianney was born Essie O'Brien in Northern Ireland and came to Australia in 1930 with her family. She came to the Dominican Ladies College in Dongara 1941 as a Lay Sister. She worked with the Dominican Sisters all her life.

Sister Gemma was born Margaret Seaman in 1933 in the Murchison. She was a boarder at Dominican Ladies College from 1943 and upon finishing school she studied teaching in Perth and then taught at Dominican schools in the Midwest and in Perth.

Sister Anita was born in Meekatharra in 1934 and she was a boarder at DLC from 1945. She then taught at DLC for nine years while studying externally for her science degree. She later taught for many years in Perth.

NOTES TO THE READER ON INTERPRETATION OF THIS TRANSCRIPT

Readers of this oral history transcript need to be aware that it is a verbatim transcript of the words as spoken during the interview that was conducted in the form of a natural conversation between the interviewer and the person being interviewed. Some minor changes have been made to facilitate the flow of the document.

Much of what is said in such interviews relies upon the accuracy of the memory of the person being interviewed and readers should bear this in mind and judge for themselves how factually accurate the material is. The interviewer has sought to clarify or verify facts and statements made during the interview where this seemed appropriate. The views and opinions expressed within the transcript are those of the person expressing them in the interview. Please refer to the notes following to aid interpretation of the transcript.

Note 1

The recording runs for a total of 61 minutes.

Note 2

Where the interviewer has used words such as ‘Yes’, ‘Right’ or ‘OK’ as an encouragement, but not as anything else then these words have not been transcribed unless they are relevant for the context.

Note 3

The interviewer has inserted occasional words (which are not in the original recording) into the transcript in order to clarify the context of what was being said. These words are shown in the form [they would say].

Note 4

Where a sentence has a series of dots in the text such as this indicates that the speaker paused, the recording was not clear enough to transcribe accurately what was said or the following speaker interrupted what was being said.

Note 5

The interviewer is referred to as ‘Parker’ in the transcript and to the subject speaker is referred to as ‘Sr Vianney/Sr Gemma/Sr Anita’ as appropriate.

Note 6

Small sections of this transcript have been removed at the request of an interviewee.

Parker I would like to introduce Anita to our discussion now. We now have Vianney, Gemma and Anita. Anita could I just ask you, where and when where you born?

Sr Anita I was born in Meekatharra. My father was in Wyndham at the time, he was the headmaster of the school up there. I was born on the 3rd of June 1934.

Parker And you came to Dongara as a student?

Sr Anita As a student in 1945, just after my father went to the war.

Parker I see. Did you have brothers and sisters that you came with?

Sr Anita I had two brothers who were going to ... two years before this, in 1943, they went to C.B.C. in Geraldton.

Parker And how did you travel? Did you come down on the train as well?

Sr Anita On the train, with all the College kids.

Parker It must have quite an adventure almost, was it?

Sr Anita It was good fun. But from Wiluna to Meekatharra, it was 105 miles, so you did that track on your own. The people who got on, got on during the night, going to College, but coming home, it was daytime, so you saw them then.

Parker Were you and Gemma on the same train?

Sr Anita Yes, going home, yes. I don't know about coming, because we didn't meet up, because it was night time.

Parker Because you were about the same year?

Sr Gemma The train used to get in about 11 or something, to our place.

Sr Anita Daytime. Coming back you saw all the kids but going to College, it was night time [discussion between Sr Anita and Sr Gemma].

Parker What were your feelings about the College? What was it a happy academic place for you?

Sr Anita It was a happy place, certainly

Parker What were favourite things? Were you a sport person or a study person?

Sr Anita I was a sports person, and a study person.

Parker Tennis, I think.

Sr Anita Yes, in my later years, after I learned how to play tennis. I learned how to play tennis from Ida Edwards, she was a Dongara girl. We eventually moved to Wonthella in Geraldton, and I met up with Ida because she was associated with Dongara. She lived in Geraldton, worked in Geraldton, she taught me how to play tennis. She was 18, I was 12.

Parker Because there were, how many tennis courts?

Sr Anita About six. We used to roll the tennis courts after rain, and we used to help mark them.

Parker What other sports did you play?

Sr Anita The athletics, and the swimming. See we did swimming lessons. Madam de Mouncey taught us swimming, and she came every year. We did our swimming exams in the ocean, at the Front Beach. [Discussion of name swimming examiner]. We did lifesaving exams, Madam de Mouncey got us ready, we had life-saving exams. I went up to the Bronze Cross in the exams, that

wasn't lifesaving, that was swimming.

Parker So all your swimming was down at the beach?

Sr Anita At the Front Beach, in the ocean. We had our swimming carnival in the ocean, on our sports day, swimming carnival. Because we had our four school teams, sports teams, and we used to compete. I think I was in Pennafort team.

Parker What were the four factions?

Sr Gemma Pennafort was one.

Sr Anita I was captain of Pennafort.

Sr Gemma All after the Dominican saints. Siena [Aquino, Ferrer].

Parker Did you actually compete as a College against anyone else?

Sr Anita Not in swimming or athletics, but we did in basketball, which was called netball at that time. It was basketball at that time but it is since called netball. And we competed with Stella Maris College in Geraldton.

Parker So you'd go to Geraldton?

Sr Anita We'd go to Geraldton, and they'd come to us.

Sr Gemma Anita was one of the main team, and she was excellent.

Sr Anita I was in the top seven team, in a team of seven. I was never the Captain, but Sally Clune was one, Betty Melvin, Hilary Hepworth, Audrey Wetters, Betty Elsworthy, Greta Cunningham, Yvonne Grant. We beat Stella Maris and won the Cup. Who coached us?

Sr Gemma Father Lynch.

Sr Anita Dean Lynch coached us, and Monsignor O'Connor coached the Stella Maris girls. We won the Cup three years in a row.

Sr Vianney Dean Lynch came to the kitchen one day and he said "Anything these boarders don't like, these girls?", and we said "Yes Father, they don't like rhubarb jam." He went down and told the
"Plenty of rhubarb, rhubarb jam, there is nothing like it to build you up" [laughter]. That was the sort of man he was.

Sr Anita And we had potato races on the terrace. Potato races, training.

Sr Gemma They had lovely uniforms made for you especially.

Sr Anita We had yellow and brown, brown collars. We had bloomers, they were that thick [laughter], down to there. But they were enormous, we had to wear them.

Parker Where was your court?

Sr Anita Down near the river, on the other side of the road. Where the tennis courts were, just near the gate into the entrance into that playing area.

Sr Gemma Basketball was further down, wasn't it love, or did we play there too? I can remember the little place opposite the cemetery, on the other side of the road.

Sr Anita I don't remember that.

Sr Vianney That was later on, after the floods.

Sr Gemma Oh was that after the floods?

Sr Anita Because I was pretty fiery, and if there was any injustice by the umpire, I would speak up.

Parker Well you need people like that. So tell me about your swimming, where did you, not just your carnivals but recreationally, where did you go?

Sr Anita We went every Saturday to the Front Beach. Criddle's truck took us to the Front Beach, and that is where we swam. There were change rooms there, and sand, and bough sheds. That was our Saturday afternoon recreation, to get us off the premises.

Parker How many could you fit in Mr Criddle's truck?

Sr Anita There would be two loads, we were all squashed up.

Sr Gemma There were little seats along the side.

Sr Anita It wasn't covered over or anything.

Sr Gemma Because we had a 90 boarder picnic, a 90 boarder year. One year we had 90 boarders. Do you remember that Vianney?

Sr Vianney I do.

Sr Gemma There were all these places, we had to share cubicles and things. If you had a little sister – Pam and I had to share this little cubicle for a while, because they had run out of cubicles.

Sr Anita See we were very modest, we didn't have lockers beside our beds. The beds were all along the balcony, and we had little cubicles that were [this size]. And there was a cupboard there, with a washbasin on top, a hand basin, and we could pull the curtains over.

Sr Vianney Starched curtains.

Sr Anita Yes starched curtains. You'd pull the curtains around when you were undressing, and then you'd pull them back. It had to be neat and tidy because otherwise

Sr Gemma And you'd have your little chair in there, and you could put some of your things. We had a locker as well.

Sr Vianney They had privacy that a lot of the boarding schools didn't have.

Sr Anita We didn't have to dress or undress in public outside in front of everybody, we had our own privacy.

Sr Gemma When we had the big influx of boarders, if you had a little sister you were in with your little sister. The two of us, Pam and I were in together [discussion].

Parker So all year you slept on the balcony?

Sr Anita There was the little set, the middle set, and the big set. And beyond that was an infirmary, so that if you were sick you were in there, with cubicles and beds.

Parker I'm just thinking that it must have got cold, did it, in the winter?

Sr Vianney I don't remember being cold.

Sr Gemma I don't either. We had plenty of blankets and things.

Parker And I guess relatively Dongara doesn't get that cold, does it.

Sr Gemma Rows and rows of beds, remember the three rows?

Sr Anita Three rows going lengthwise.

Sr Gemma And they all had beautiful quilts that had been made by the Sisters with DLC on them. The DLC was hand-done wasn't it Vianney?

Sr Vianney Yes, they were all hand-done, that was recreation time. You didn't waste a minute. Your recreation, your free, but you were taught with white and big blue [material], and it had to be to perfection or it would be sent back to undo it all again if you hadn't done it

properly. Satin stitch.

Sr Anita

That was all done by the time we became nuns.

Sr Gemma

We were taught how to make our beds too, I remember being given a lesson on how to make our beds.

Parker

Because there was probably quite a standard you had to achieve?

Sr Anita

Oh yes, even the way the hem goes on the sheet.

Sr Gemma

You were taught lots of things when you were in Dongara. And you had to show your basin to show that it was clean, little basins you wash your face and hands in.

Sr Anita

You had to take it under your elbow, and your brush and comb, and you had to go and show the person who was on duty, the nun who was on duty, that you had cleaned your brush, and the basin had been wiped out clean. And you couldn't go to bed until you did that.

Sr Gemma

Remember [Sr] Albertus? Another year we had little tooth mugs, and she'd come and say, she'd pick up one that wasn't very clean and she'd say "Look at this dirty mug", and we had to keep them clean, the little mug you put your toothbrush in.

Sr Anita

I remember [Sr] Joseph one time, when I was a boarder, and see I had long hair, and at night I had it unplaited, and I took along the brush to her, and she said "That's not clean, clean that". No, she reckoned I'd dropped the hairs on the floor. So she went out to the balcony to say the prayers, you know, she walked up and down and we all prayed, and she turned the light off [laughter]. I couldn't find any hairs on the floor, so when I heard her coming back, her footsteps, I grabbed a handful of hair off my head and showed it to her and she said "Yes, and there was more too!" [laughter].

Sr Vianney See the lights had to go out at nine o'clock because there was not electricity. We had our own Delco engine down the back, and once we all went to bed, the last one had an eye on the clock, so she had to get down to that engine and switch that off at night time, which meant that boarding school was affected in the same way. Until electricity was brought to Dongara, power yes.

Parker How far away did the boarders come from? Were they mostly from the Midwest?

Sr Anita Quite a few came from the north, north west, there were ones from Gibb River, Roebourne. Sometimes they were held up because of floods, and they were late for school term.

Sr Gemma Derby, my cousin was from Derby, her father was the Minister for Police or something.

Sr Vianney The Russ's, from Gibb River Station.

Sr Anita Then from Wiluna, Meekatharra, Cue, Mount Magnet. And they were mostly on stations, and so [were] fairly well off people.

Sr Gemma And then the people in the Midwest, like Mingenew, Three Springs, Carnamah, Coorow, Morawa, they all came from those farming areas. Perenjori [Discussion of Nullagine]. And even, the Shines came from Bunbury, and the Donovans came from Kellerberrin.

Sr Vianney Kelleberrin had connections with someone with Dongara, and they would want them to be there, then they'd stay there.

Sr Anita Eventually there were some from Indonesia. Remember Marie Louise? Marie Louise arrived from Singapore. She came with a bride's trousseau [discussion]. And Sister Declan was in charge of the middle set at the time, and she was helping her unpack and everything, and she sent her off to have a bath, and get ready for bed. And Marie Louise came back and said "There's no water, there's no water in the tub" [laughter].

Sr Vianney She was waiting for the servant [laughter].

Sr Anita The water was hard, you couldn't soap it, it was salt water. You couldn't lather. And sometimes it was warm and sometimes it wasn't, depending on the heating.

Sr Vianney Another time a girl, she arrived in the afternoon, someone had brought her from Perth, Francis Payne, and someone said "Did you come here today?", "No", she said "I didn't come here to die, I came here today to school" [laughter].

Sr Anita That was like Father Spain used to preach at the bush schools, "We'll pray now, for the Pope today", so we'd all pray for the Pope to die.

Parker Did you have speech and drama at your school?

Sr Anita We had speech lessons, music lessons. The Trinity examiner came and the University lady came, to examine speech and singing and piano.

Sr Gemma Everything. We had exams every year.

Sr Anita We had elocution – you know, speech stuff – and we had piano. I had learned the violin from Sister Ambrose, she was a genius with the violin.

Parker When did you do your music lessons, were they sort of after your ...

Sr Gemma After school, or before school.

Sr Anita Madam Le Tessior used to come, was she speech? And Doctor Ford came, Trinity, to examine the Trinity Music [discussion].

Sr Vianney They had the best up from Perth [discussion].

Parker And some languages as well?

Sr Anita French and Italian. And Latin for a while, Mother Laurence taught that. But there weren't enough students to do it.

Sr Vianney They used to do Greek as well.

Sr Gemma Before we were there they used to do Domestic Science. We didn't actually do it.

Parker So Anita, how did it then follow on that you went into the Order, and went onto University? What was that transition after school?

Sr Anita We didn't go out to university. I studied externally forever. I did my whole degree externally except for one unit which I did in formal class. Everything else was external.

Parker So you finished school and stayed at DLC, and yet you managed to study externally at the same time?

Sr Anita I wouldn't say I learned anything, but I passed.

Parker You must be extraordinarily smart. So what did you do, Gemma, what was your background?

Sr Gemma I went to a Training College to study for two years to be a teacher. Graylands, It wasn't Graylands, love, it was Claremont.

Parker So you came and lived in Perth?

Sr Gemma I came and lived here. There were five of us going to the Training College at the same time.

Sr Anita They were all from the Novitiate, straight from the Novitiate.

Sr Gemma There were other sisters who were second years when Dolores and I were First Year Students. There were two years at Claremont Training College, and then after that we went out to teach.

Sr Anita Concepta was sent to university. And Ann Costello.

Sr Gemma Regina, Assumpta, they were all at Uni.

Parker What was the difference though, you all came out with a university degree?

Sr Gemma No I didn't come out with a degree, [I got] a Teacher's College degree.

Parker And where did you go after you finished your training?

Sr Gemma First I was sent up to Dongara, I only was there for weeks when I was sent to Morawa, because the Sister in Morawa got sick. They said it would be useful if I went, and I was there for two years [laughter]. Then after that I was sent down to Perth, and I went to different schools in Perth, like Morley Park, Bedford Park, Bentley, St Dominic's, St John's.

Parker I'm really interested in, when you were at school, did you have the feeling then that you would stay with the church? For people like you, did you always feel like that, or was it something that came on you just before you left school? How did that work?

Sr Gemma I'm not sure really, I think as I got older ...

Sr Anita You decided first, but we didn't decide with each other. We didn't know about each other's decisions.

Sr Gemma I didn't know about Anita, and she didn't know about me.

Parker So it wasn't something that you discussed and decided.

Sr Anita No. And she came in April and I came in February.

Sr Gemma She entered before I did. My dad wanted me to stay a little bit longer, to make sure I knew what I was doing. So I did.

Sr Anita See I was in Geraldton, Wonthella. My mother, when I told her, wouldn't talk to me anymore. She was quite disgusted.

Parker I thought she would have been thrilled?

Sr Anita Mum was the sort of person who would say "Okay kids, get up and go to church", and she'd stay in bed.

Parker And yet in a way it was such a courageous thing to do.

Sr Anita She had four aunts who were nuns. Two in Presentation in Geraldton, and two Black Joes [Josephs] in Fremantle.

Parker So, was it quite a difference to join, and come back to Dongara, not as a student but as part of the Convent?

Sr Anita You couldn't talk to the kids.

Parker You weren't allowed to?

Sr Anita No, it was different, we were on the other side [discussion].

Parker What does the Novitiate mean?

Sr Gemma That means when you first enter you become a Postulant, and you do that for six to twelve months.

Sr Anita It was a spiritual year, you didn't go near anyone. Didn't mix with anyone, except your own Novitiate people. For everyone else, black veil meant you were sent out to the Missions. For me, black veil meant staying with Novitiate Sisters for another year, but teaching, in the College.

Sr Gemma In those days you made your profession, and in those days, you made First Profession for three years, and Final Profession after three the years.

Sr Vianney Some are born teachers, aren't they?

Sr Anita Aloysius was in charge, and she used to tell the story. She took me up to the Sacred Heart classroom, where there was the two first years of the secondary school, Years 8 and 9. And she would take me up there, introduce me to the class, and leave me. And then she said, she'd go back to the Mistress of Schools office, and I'd be in behind it, saying "What will I do?" [laughter].

Parker You would have only been 19? And you were taking classes of 16 and 17 year olds?

Sr Anita Yes.

Parker What would have been the breakup of the age groups? Would you mostly have had older students, or did you have quite a lot of primary students as well?

Sr Anita In the Primary Section there were Bubs, years 1,2,3, and 4, was it?

Sr Gemma No, 1,2,3, I think, and then the next group was 4,5,6 and 7.

Parker So when you were students and Vianney was there, there wouldn't have been any interaction?

Sr Anita No. And even in the Novitiate, we weren't allowed to talk to the other nuns who weren't in the Novitiate.

Sr Gemma It was part of the training. But we had a lot to do with the sisters in a sense, in the chapel, we were all in there together, the dining room we were all there together.

Parker When did the Irish Sisters arrive?

Sr Anita A big batch of Irish Sisters, who were Postulants [came out from Ireland]. That's probably what partly affected my decision.

Sr Anita Mother Laurence, who was our Prioress General, went over to Ireland, and they all came with her. She went over seeking Postulants, and she came back with twelve.

Parker And how long did they stay?

Sr Vianney Some of them are still here today.

Sr Anita Cecilia is in this house, and Assumpta, and Annunciata, and Regina, who is our Prioress. Antoninus has had a stroke and is a nursing home [discussion of Irish nuns]. And over the years other Irish ones came. Some stayed, Maria stayed, Eileen, Josephine, Bernadine.

Parker So a really strong flow.

Sr Anita In my novitiate, Gemma's too, there were 30 Irish and three Australian [discussion of makeup of Novitiate].

Sr Vianney There are more Irish in Doubleview [Convent] than there are Australian, there are more Irish here.

Parker What about New Zealand, did they used to flow that way as well?

Sr Anita They were all there when we arrived and were much older.

Parker So when you said it affected your decision, do you mean they had such a positive influence on you as a last year student?

Sr Anita Well, you weren't allowed to talk to them of course, you just saw them in the Chapel, and saw them around. But it would have had an effect.

Sr Gemma You saw them, looking very happy, and with a happy way of life.

Sr Anita And where there was life.

Sr Gemma There was life too, wasn't there, and they did lots of things, and they bought lots of gifts to the group, you know.

Sr Vianney There were some nice looking girls among them too, which helped. They were travelling, they got on the bus, they were going to Perth for the dentist or something, and they got on this bus, and they heard one man say "What a shame" [laughter]. Because they were beautiful looking. That was one of things, you were told all the things you were going to miss, how could you leave this, you know, to go into that, but they never told us all the things we might escape, like a broken marriage and the suffering people had. The Irish were generally speaking very beautiful people to look at.

Sr Anita They were beautiful, and they were young. Eighteen year olds.

Parker Why would they have come to Dongara?

Sr Anita Well Mother Laurence went to Ireland and bought them back with her. And there was a nun over in Ireland who gathered them and told them a good story.

Sr Vianney About this being good missionary country. Because [unclear], when she came, she couldn't work out she didn't see many palm leaves, she told she was coming to missionary country, they thought they were coming to China or something. And I remember Thomas and those thought they were going to be teaching black

people.

- Sr Anita And looking for kangaroos down the street. All those stories. So you need to talk to some of the Irish.
- Parker I spoke to Vianney a bit before, that how, although you were there, you didn't actually have much to do with the town at all.
- Sr Anita No, only if you had to go and take the car to get it fixed. But there were a couple of girls, school girls. Judy Dempster, she was from a farm.
- Sr Gemma She was in the basketball team. There was Margaret Keats, her father had a business in Dongara. And the Brennans.
- Sr Vianney The Kirks, their mother had the shop there. and the girl whose father was a chemist [Rikki Porteous] [discussion about local students, several others named].
- Sr Anita Maeve McNeill, they had the house on the corner, used to be called Simpsons House. We had dancing lessons, and a teacher came from Geraldton in the winter term, and once a week we had these dancing lessons. We danced with each other, you know, girls with girls, and Judy Dempster was my partner, and she always took the man's part. Because she used to go to the Saturday night dances in the town. She was a good tennis player too, left-handed tennis player.
- Sr Gemma Marie Smith was from Dongara, she was a very attractive girl, she died you know, cancer.
- Sr Vianney Talking about having contact with the town, Mrs Day (?) used to give us a hand with the laundry, and one day she was over in the town, and a man was over there, he was one of the old identities, and he said "What do they do over there all day?", and she said "They eat, pray and wash up" [laughter].
- Sr Gemma She wasn't far wrong either. I remember Dongara, there were lovely gardens, and all the lovely flowers growing, in the Convent part.

Parker I spoke to [local woman Gail Smith], and said one of the saddest things was when the school closed, as a convent.

Sr Gemma We didn't realise how they really loved us to be there, you see.

Parker And really had such an identity and such positive presence there, I think people remember it very fondly.

Sr Anita Boarders weren't allowed to go to the town, you couldn't go and buy something or anything like that.

Sr Gemma Were you there when we used to go for walks along Perth Road? You'd get all dressed up in your best, with your berets and gloves and everything on a Sunday morning. I remember doing it as a little kid, you know. Up the Perth Road. And all Saturday afternoon down at the beach in our blue dresses.

Parker [I wanted to ask you about] what the town now refers to as Nun's Pool, which does seem to be a myth. Which is a pool which is just near the mouth of the river. There seems to be a story that this is where the nuns used to swim, and that it was actually cleared for the nuns.

Sr Anita It was not in our time, we heard nothing about Nun's Pool. There was a sand bar, and when floods came in the sand bar had to be broken to let the water out.

Sr Gemma We used to go for walks up there, past the Monastery, and have afternoon tea or something.

Sr Anita And some days we'd walk on the other side near the cemetery.

Sr Gemma They didn't have a pool there though.

Sr Vianney There was a building that belonged to the Benedictines, it was a doctor's house. When Dongara was a little township the doctor owned that big home, and we used to go there ourselves for afternoons, it was great to get over there, and light the fire and put afternoon tea on, in the Christmas holidays. The Benedictines then,

we had one of their Chaplains sometimes, and they made it known that this place was empty. At this time the Benedictines were looking after native children, and they also ..the girls ..run by the Marists, the Sisters of South Perth looked after the girl's school. They arranged then to buy the Monastery and turn it into a holiday home for the children, But then they were closed as a school

Sr Anita It was a lovely place. We used to go there as nuns for Halloween, and we used to be hanging up apples on strings.

Sr Gemma I used to be peering into rooms, it was so beautiful [discussion about the building].

Parker I was asking Vianney before about the beachhouse. Do you remember spending any time in the beachhouse? Could you describe it for me?

Sr Anita A house with lattice all around the verandah, and there was a verandah you could walk around inside the lattice, and that's where the beds were. And say the Rosary. And then inside there was a parlour, a kitchen, and there were four cubicles, and with a bed and a locker. But the [partitions] only went up about five feet high, six feet high. But that is where you changed.

Sr Gemma And out back there was a shower.

Sr Anita And there was a toilet down in the yard. Because one time when I was down in the toilet, a snake put his head under the door, and I stood on the seat, and opened the door and yelled for everybody to come because of the snake, and he got frightened off [laughter]

Parker Because it's a beautiful location, isn't it.

Sr Anita And out the front, we didn't go out the front much, it always seemed to be locked, we went out the back door. We were only allowed, as nuns, to swim at the Back beach, where all the seaweed was.

Parker Was that South Beach?

Sr Anita Yes, not the Back Beach, the South Beach. Because we couldn't be seen in our bathers. But see we wore bathers. The nuns from New Norcia wore dresses, not their nun's dresses but just coloured dresses. They were the Spanish Sisters.

Parker I think one of the Sisters was explaining to me last time that they would get changed in the rocks there.

Sr Anita Under the rocks there. From the cottage you could go down, you'd be covered up but not in your bathers only, you know. Then we swam here, in Perth, we'd have to put our cappas (cloaks) on, a travelling cappa, which had sort of wings, and we'd have our veil on, and then we'd go into the sandhills, put our bathing cap on, take our capper off, and the bathers on underneath to go for a swim, could not be seen. We'd always swim where there were no lifesavers or other people, always seemed to be in the dangerous part, you know. One time I remember Ann Costello, she was a wag, she's still alive but she left a long time ago, she had this cappa on, and she went somewhere with one of the other nuns, because you always had to travel in twos, went to St John of God Hospital to visit someone, she had her bathers on underneath her cappa, it was all done up. A priest came along and said "Oh look, let me see the beautiful Dominican habit" [laughter]

Parker I thought it was interesting, one of the Sisters was describing how she first came to Dongara, and she said the thing she remembers most was driving past the beach cottage, and there were a number of nuns, I think she could see them behind the lattice, is it doing the circular

Sr Anita There was a road behind, because we used to go around and drive up to the back door to park the car in the sand.

Parker I think it was early '40s. She'd come over from Melbourne and she had this distinct vision of very formal habit.

Sr Gemma Was she a sister?

Parker She was a Sister I spoke to the other day here.

Sr Anita Helen probably.

Parker She had a vision of a very monastic place.

Sr Vianney It was monastic, yes.

Sr Anita When St Vincent was there, you trooped around in procession to say the Rosary, a few times. It didn't happen when she wasn't there.

Parker That's what she was talking about. Could you describe the habit for me?

Sr Gemma It was lovely.

Sr Anita Lovely? It was very hard to get used to.

Sr Gemma But after a few years that changed to something softer.

Sr Anita That went for a long time though, ten years or more.

Sr Vianney See when they were founded that's how the women dressed.

Sr Anita It was mediaeval.

Sr Vianney Really they had trains.

Sr Gemma It was hard to keep clean.

Sr Anita And we were only allowed to wash it every six weeks, because it was serge and it would shrink.. You wore an apron most of the day, not when you were teaching, you had to have the scapular.

Parker Vianney, you said your outfit changed.

Sr Anita They [the Lay Sisters] had the black scapular, to start, and they changed to cream.

Parker What year was that?

Sr Vianney 1954.

Sr Anita All the time we were at school [they had it].

Sr Gemma But when we went to the Convent you just dressed the same as everybody else.

Sr Anita The Lay Sisters didn't say the Divine Office, but you did from then on, didn't you.

Sr Vianney Oh yes, yes.

Sr Anita Once the scapular changed, they came to Divine Office.

Sr Gemma Which is what it should be.

Parker It was more a doing away with the class system, sort of.

Sr Anita Yes, that's right, thank God.

Parker What other sort of changes have you see in your time?

Sr Vianney Drastic changes.

Sr Anita Well, look at us now.

Parker The ladies are looking very casual.

Sr Vianney Driving cars.

Sr Anita And having your hair done, wearing slacks. And this is what I wear to work.

Sr Gemma Nobody wears the habit any more.

Sr Anita Some religions who start something, and it lasts four or five years, and they don't get anyone following them, so..

Parker What is the ethos behind the Dominicans that make them different to other orders?

Sr Anita One is that they are intellectual. They tend to be teachers rather than social workers. Its more university people and lecturers, they are into education rather than nursing homes and hands-on.

Sr Gemma Order of Preachers, OP means Order of Preachers, teach the gospel through learning.

Sr Anita And by example.

Parker This is when I became particularly interested, when I realized the Dominicans were so strong in education, because I believe in that enormously. And to think of that little town, such an extraordinary education.

Sr Anita Mother Laurence was our Superior when we entered, and she was very intellectual herself, and she drove study study study, and that is why we chose to go to public training colleges. But even before her time, Xavier, Emmanuel, all the older ones had been to university and had got degrees, so it is a Dominican thing.

Parker Carmen Lawrence was a Dominican student?

Sr Gemma She started off in Morawa so she was with the Sisters for quite a while. I think she has fond memories, she was boarder there for a while in Dongara.

Parker Yes we have some of her recollections in the museum in Dongara and she speaks very fondly and kindly of it.

Sr Gemma Her sister Norma, and Pauline, I think a lot of the Lawrences boarded there [discussion of the Lawrences and Cokers]. Gwen Miller, music.

Sr Anita Gwen still teaches the violin, she has got 70 pupils, she is older than me, and I'm 80. She comes to our reunions. We meet on the last Friday in May.

Sr Gemma 29th this year, Pam said it is. You're going to get an invitation.

Parker How many of you gather?

Sr Anita Last time it was about 20, 15 to 20.

Sr Gemma Sometimes more than that, last time it was about 30 something, last one was one of the best we've ever had. They have one here. There's something about the Dongara girls, they stick together.

Sr Anita Kids who have reunions now, they have it in classes, Dongara never had it in classes, it was just everybody.

Sr Gemma You all knew each other.

Sr Anita One lady turned up last year with photos, the same photos we've all got. She started there in 1938. None of us knew her, we were saying "Who is she?" Her daughter bought her along, and she was as clear as a bell.

Parker Vianney, when did you finish in Dongara? Were you there until the close of the Convent?

Sr Vianney No, we came down to Scarborough in 1969, before it closed. I went back again, the work was getting a bit heavy for me. I went back to help with the packing, for the closing, for a couple of weeks.

Sr Anita Vianney has the history, and I don't know whether she'll believe this or not, but when Susanne was putting things down for the incinerator, Vianney had been dragging them back! [laughter].

Sr Vianney Just get the job done. No point thinking about it, move it on [discussion about Susanne].

Parker I'd like to thank you very much for your time today, I have enjoyed this so much. I think this is a beautiful contribution to the gathering of Dongara's history on tape. I really appreciate it.
Thank you very much.