

CPM Reviews

Transcript: Research Interview

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Date of Recording: 8 July, 2019

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Identifier	Name / Position	Role
Mr Haggar:	Clive Haggar, Former Secretary	Interviewer
Ms Ryan:	Julia Ryan	Interviewee

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Mr Haggar: It's the 8th of July, 2019. I am meeting with Ms Julia Ryan, who's a very longstanding member of the AEU dating back to its very early beginnings. And, Julia was an activist right throughout her time working as a teacher in the system, and she's agreed to be interviewed. We'll talk obviously about her teaching career, but also to women's organisations with the AEU, the School Without Walls, and some other interesting elements. So, thank you very much Julia.

Ms Ryan: Okay.

Mr Haggar: And, perhaps we could begin by you giving me an outline of what your actual teaching history was?

Ms Ryan: Yes. Well, I started teaching in 1960, and I joined the New South Wales Teachers Federation that year of course, the first year of equal pay for

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women. I always think I wouldn't have been a teacher if it had been unequal pay, but I wouldn't have had much choice. Anyway, so I was there in New South Wales at the Fairfield Girls High, but then very soon after that I moved to Queensland with my husband and went on national service, which is what I call my child rearing days. I always put national service on my CV. Nobody ever queried it. And, I went up to Queensland and actually taught in Queensland for a year too. I would have been a member of the union there.

Mr Haggar: **The Queensland Teacher's Union?**

Ms Ryan: Yes. The Teacher's Union. But I came to Canberra actually in the 1960s, and I started teaching at Telopea in 1965, and that's when I resumed my membership of the New South Wales Teachers Federation. And, at that time I remember we had separate meetings for high school and primary. There were separate segments of the New South Wales Teachers Federation. And, I remember Barry Price was the convenor or chair or whatever, and we used to have our meetings after school at Campbell High School. I remember, in the '60s.

Mr Haggar: **So, this is the ACT - - -**

Ms Ryan: ACT Regional Association of the New South Wales Teachers Federation. But I think it mightn't have even been that. It might have just been the ACT sub-branch of the Secondary School Teachers Association of the New South Wales Teachers Federation – I'm not sure whether there was an overlap. I think there were the primary teachers and the secondary teachers and we'd meet separately.

Mr Haggar: **Both in separate associations.**

Ms Ryan: We never met together I don't think, except on the first strike, the very first New South Wales Teachers Federation strike, which was some time in 1968.

Mr Haggar: **1968.**

Ms Ryan: Yes. We all got together at the Albert Hall, and that was a big event.

Mr Haggar: **Good turnout?**

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Ms Ryan: It was standing room only, I think. I mean I don't know what the percentage was. It would have been 80 percent at least I think, but I'm only guessing.

Mr Haggar: It's the novelty of the first action.

Ms Ryan: Well, it was also we were very – and it was about conditions for students as much – it wasn't about pay. It was about conditions. It was about class sizes and stuff like that. Well, that was from then, and I continued as a member of that until we broke away. And, you've told me that it was 1973 that the first meeting was?

Mr Haggar: The mass meeting where the decision was taken - - -

Ms Ryan: I have no particular recollection of that meeting, but I was probably there, because I never missed a meeting if I could – and I was always an active member of the ACT branch. And, I was at the School Without Walls for seven years when we didn't have a separate school branch – we were all members of the union, went along to things. But when I was at Canberra High after that, I was President of the local sub-branch, and then later on at Lake Ginninderra College, I was President of that sub-branch. And, again, when I went to work in the Schools Office, I was the President of that sub-branch.

Mr Haggar: What sort of motivated you to take on those leadership roles?

Ms Ryan: Well, mainly nobody else wanted to do it. I mean I was not looking for any pathway anywhere, and if anyone else was prepared to do it, I never stood against them. It was a sort of default thing. And, I could chair a meeting.

Mr Haggar: Which is important.

Ms Ryan: Yes. Yes. That's right.

Mr Haggar: So, when the decision was taken at that mass meeting to move away from the New South Wales Teachers Federation, was there a significant support for that decision across - - -

Ms Ryan: I think so. Yes. In the whole thing, I think the only people who were really having doubts about breaking away or being separate from New South

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Wales, however you like to put it, were some of the principals whose superannuation was going to be affected. But I don't recall anybody dying to stay with New South Wales. In fact, we always saw Bridge Street (NSW Department of Education headquarters) as the enemy as a teacher. In fact, I remember as a young teacher having fantasies about blowing up Bridge Street. I mean it was such a rigid system, and we saw it that way anyway – of education. I'm not talking about the union here, but the New South Wales Department of Education, which my ex-husband, reckons that the Soviet Union modelled their bureaucracy on the New South Wales Department of Education, which of course predated it. So, that was our feeling, so the idea of breaking away was very popular.

Mr Haggar: **It wasn't so popular amongst the members of the New South Wales Teachers Federation organisation in Sydney from what I understand. They were opposed to the creation of secondary colleges, they were opposed to the creation of a separate ACT system, and they were opposed to the creation of a separate union.**

Ms Ryan: I think by that time we were up and away, and we didn't care what New South Wales Teachers Federation felt about those ACT matters.

Mr Haggar: **One history I've read suggests that one of the reasons why they were relatively unsupportive was because an ACT teacher had succeeded in winning the Presidency of the New South Wales Teachers Federation for a couple of years.**

Ms Ryan: I can't remember that. Who was it?

Mr Haggar: **Len Childs.**

Ms Ryan: Len Childs? Yes. I don't have a clear recollection of that. I mean it might come to me, but I can't remember that. We were very active of course, and we had such a high – well, everywhere in New South Wales had a high proportion, but we were particularly active unionists here in the ACT.

Mr Haggar: **With the establishment of the system, can you remember the kinds of issues that motivated teachers at the time?**

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Ms Ryan: We were very keen on the idea of writing our own curriculum. That was a very important factor for us. And, also, we liked the idea of being associated with the Commonwealth. I guess it was the time. As we know, the Whitlam Government came in soon after. It was that feeling that the Commonwealth was the way forward rather than New South Wales.

Mr Haggar: And, of course there was no ACT self-government.

Ms Ryan: No. No. It was well before that. That's right. We saw ourselves as part of a brave new world, I think.

Mr Haggar: And, of course with no ACT Government, you had the establishment of an interim ACT Schools Authority.

Ms Ryan: Schools Authority, which saw itself as a very progressive and innovatory outfit. In fact, was very happy to help set up an alternative school in the ACT education system, which New South Wales would never have done.

Mr Haggar: This is the School Without Walls?

Ms Ryan: The School Without Walls.

Mr Haggar: Would you like to talk a bit about the School Without Walls?

Ms Ryan: Yeah, I'll talk about that. The idea of that was put forward in 1973, which was just I think the very first year of the Interim ACT Schools Authority. And, they were very keen on pursuing it, and it was even before the first Chief Education Officer was appointed.

Mr Haggar: Was Professor Hedley Beare the first - - -

Ms Ryan: Hedley Beare. But he became a big supporter too. The School Without Walls was set up for students aged 15 plus, which means you didn't run into the compulsory attendance problem, and it was also very much for senior students, and only 100 were catered for. So, it started officially at the beginning of '74, but people always think of it starting in mid-'73, because it did meet informally for six months before that, and after school times, things like that.

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So, yes, I don't know what you particularly want to know about it, but I was there for the seven years, and that was very important. And, it was always seen as an important part for the staff in that seven years of the School Without Walls that they get involved as much as possible in the activities of the union, because we always felt a little bit under threat. We were so unusual, and the Canberra Times didn't like us much, and there was always scandal. There were a series of scandals with some of the students. And so, we saw it as a very important thing to have union support for the thing, which we did have, even though I know a lot of the members of the union – I mean our critics were as much from within the system as much as from without it.

Mr Haggar: **But it did provide, from what I understand, a significant release valve for students who were having difficulties - - -**

Ms Ryan: It was for all sorts of students. Those who just didn't like a classroom at all and couldn't sit in it, but also some of the absolutely very bright students who were impatient with the education they were getting. We had the full range throughout the time of the School Without Walls. Anyway, so it was all very exciting. Very exciting time.

Mr Haggar: **And, in the end it was closed.**

Ms Ryan: It was closed in '96. It went all that time. Several chief education officers I think wanted to get rid of it, but in the end Fran Hinton worked out how to – and it was a bit sad. There was a lot of struggle against it. I mean times have changed in a way, and certainly the ACT Department of Education wasn't the old ACT Schools Authority which set it up.

Mr Haggar: **I was going to say - - -**

Ms Ryan: It was changed. In fact, given the struggle that SWOW had towards the end, it's amazing it lasted as long as it did. A bit sad. Yeah. I wanted to add that in that time, the School Without Walls, and then I think later on when I was at Canberra High – I can't quite remember exactly, but I was part of a three person committee, sub-committee of the union with Audrey Duke and Ken Hogan

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Ms Ryan: We were looking into permanent part time work, and that was for women. That was part of the women's thing. And, this is long before it was even envisaged or came in. The union was promoting it, but we set up the rules and guidelines, but it wasn't introduced until many years after that I don't think.

Mr Haggar: I think when Joan Corbett was Secretary.

Ms Ryan: Yes. I think it was probably was. Yes. I can't quite remember.

Mr Haggar: We're looking at about '83/'84 from memory.

Ms Ryan: That's when I was at Canberra High then.

Mr Haggar: So, going just back to those early years at the moment, I mean permanent part time work was a significant issue, as you said, but largely for female staff. It's certainly been enjoyed by males as well. But can you talk to me about the early years of your membership, and particularly from a gender perspective?

Ms Ryan: That's right. Well, I was a member of – in 1970 we formed a group of – I mean this is not to do with teaching, but we formed a group of Women's Liberation in Canberra. The first new wave feminist group was the Women's Liberation formed in 1970 in Canberra, and it gradually grew. But one of the out things of that group was to get women's caucuses or women's groups going within the organisations. And Biff Ward and I, very early in the piece – it might have been as early as 1972, early '72. I think that would have been – yes, it would have been then. We tried to form a women's group within the union. We called a meeting. Barry Price had just taken over old Canberra High). It was made a resource centre, a teaching resource centre. Was that '72 do you think?

Mr Haggar: It could have been '71, but it was - - -

Ms Ryan: It wouldn't have been '71, because I was overseas all of '71. So, '72 it probably was.

Mr Haggar: Can I just check one thing? You said Women's Liberation. Was this WEL?

Ms Ryan: No. Not Women's Electoral Lobby. I'm talking about Women's Liberation, which is an earlier and more radical group. A revolutionary group in many ways. I mean it came out of left-wing protest movements, whereas Women's Electoral Lobby, which was formed in '72 – was not formed until that election year you see – and that was a more respectable middle-class lobby group. For instance, my mother (noted Australian feminist Edna Ryan) was in that when she was in Sydney. A lot of people were in both. I mean I'm just saying – but those of us in Women's Liberation saw ourselves as more radical, but fine with Women's Electoral Lobby. These days those distinctions have all been blurred.

Yes. I'm just talking about what I call the pre-history really of the women's groups within the union. We called a meeting, and we got about 20 women there. We called it just through our own networks. It was just asking friends who were teachers and members of the union to come and talk about women in the union. Well, it was a disaster. We'd already been in women's liberations for a couple of years, so we were very – and of course we had an amazing reputation, bra burning and all of that, which never really happened. But that sort of thing. We had bad press. And, our respectable middle-class friends were very frightened of us, and they didn't want to – and they just went 'We want to work in with our colleagues'. There wasn't a single woman above – I mean there was an occasional deputy I think, but I don't know - - -

Mr Haggard: There were no women principals in secondary.

Ms Ryan: There were absolutely no women principals, and few in a primary school. There might have been the odd one in primary. Anyway, the thing is they'd talk about career path, talk about conditions, talk about – got absolutely nowhere. We thought too soon, too soon, too soon. So, that's interesting. That's early '72. I think it was just as school was beginning or just before school began in whatever year it was, and I think it was '72 that we did that. So, that was hopeless, and we sort of gave up for a while. I'm not sure when the first – and so the next move to form a group within the union would have come a couple of years after that, and it was not from Women's Liberation. It was from just women in the union who had possibly connections with somewhere like WEL.

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As I said, this was before the formation of WEL that we called this meeting. And, you should talk to Biff Ward about that. She would probably have a very strong memory of it, because we felt so crushed by the failure to raise the consciousness of women teachers in the union, that we sort of went away for – I mean actually by the end of the year we were working in the School Without Walls, and I would have been at Woden High in that year. Was I? No. '72. Yeah. Woden High. And, she would have been at Canberra High. But by the end of the year, we were both at the School Without Walls, and sort of turned ourselves inward for a while.

So, when a group finally did form, I was only an occasional member, because I was involved in other things. But it started to work like a proper caucus. And so, I can't tell you who was the instigator and the former of that group, who formed that group.

Mr Haggar: **But in terms of some of the members of that group in the early days, Audrey Duke you mentioned, Val Baker?**

Ms Ryan: Val Baker definitely.

Mr Haggar: **And, Biff Ward?**

Ms Ryan: Yes. Biff may not have been a member, because she got burnt out when she was the level two principal of SWOW you might say. She got burnt out after about three or four years, so she retired from the profession then, and also from the union.

Mr Haggar: **I can name names - - -**

Ms Ryan: But it was in that time, and I was an occasional member. We used to have – we met in the form of afternoon teas at people's houses. So, Paddy Marlton from SWOW was involved in that too, but she's died since, so can't talk to her. We used to go along to those. Patty and I used to go along to those, the afternoon teas. Now, who were some of the people? Well, I can remember Joan Corbett as a math teacher.

Mr Haggar: **Cassandra Parkinson was very active from TAFE earlier on.**

Ms Ryan: Who?

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Mr Haggar: **Cassandra Parkinson.**

Ms Ryan: Cassandra. Yes. She was quite involved. I can't remember – who was the woman who ran – gosh.

Mr Haggar: **Margaret Dempster's name comes up a lot.**

Ms Ryan: Margaret?

Mr Haggar: **Dempster. Primary school principal.**

Ms Ryan: Yes. O'Connor?

Mr Haggar: **Cheryl O'Connor?**

Ms Ryan: Cheryl O'Connor. Yes. And, the one who ran the co-op school. Who was that? I remember meeting at her house. She had a lovely townhouse. Look, I can see the faces. What I might do is as the names occur to me I'll email you, because – gosh. I'm very bad at remembering particular names. I do remember the afternoon teas though, and that's when we used to plan, organise. We ran as a proper caucus, and we'd look at positions in the union, we wanted positions in the union. We started to look, and it was from that that Cheryl O'Connor for instance made the big thing to apply for the principalship of Lake Ginninderra College, but that was a long time later. But it was that sort of thing, encouraging women to stand, to put – of course, part of being part of a new ACT system meant that you could apply for jobs. You didn't wait to get your classification and then get an appointment, the lists that New South Wales used to run. So, that opened it up more for us as well. Though some of our early members – I can remember the girl supervisor at Telopea back in the bad old days, she was at the top of list two, but she wasn't even a subject master. She was just a girl supervisor. That was Bett Thompson, Pat Thompson's wife. Just looking back at that, she should have been a principal. Ridiculous.

Mr Haggar: **But also, whilst you didn't have the strict seniority of the old list system in New South Wales, you still had an eligibility process - - -**

Ms Ryan: You didn't have the seniority.

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Mr Haggar: **But you had an eligibility process.**

Ms Ryan: Yes. We had the eligibility. That was nothing compared with the rigidity of the old New South Wales system. Most of us had more seniority anyway than a lot of the blokes we were teaching with.

Mr Haggar: **A lot of you had broken service because of child rearing - - -**

Ms Ryan: Yeah. Because of our national service.

Mr Haggar: **The assessment too as to a person's eligibility was peer assessment as it was described.**

Ms Ryan: Yeah. That's right. All that. And, I remember how – quite important was one of the new directors – that would have been into the '80s actually, when the department itself began to get more women in senior positions, and a couple of them were instrumental in changing the selection criteria or making them broader and more inclusive of women's interests, that sort of thing. I've forgotten – she was famous one. I know her very well too. She didn't last very long, but I've seen her since. She's in New South Wales now. She's long retired. I know her. I travelled to Africa with her. I just can't remember her name.

Mr Haggar: **The first two female directors were Cheryl O'Connor and Anne Murray**

Ms Ryan: No. Shirley. Shirley Randall. She's very - - -

Mr Haggar: **She was a senior executive service director before we had the specific schools-based directors.**

Ms Ryan: That's right. She was very instrumental in smoothing the path for women. Very instrumental. Shirley Randall. She's come from the Public Service Commission or something. She was really up on public service stuff. She wasn't a teacher by background. She was as public servant. And, she'd started in an NGO actually. I think she knew every Bishop in Australia, not to mention the Pacific. But I mean I do remember her being instrumental in this.

I don't think she came to our little afternoon teas or anything. I don't think. She might have, but I can't remember that.

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- Mr Haggar:** **There's a bit of folklore around Shirley's appointment, in that it was expected that the job would go to a senior male person already in the department.**
- Ms Ryan: Yeah. It was very much one of those times when there were some shock women appointments, and she was definitely in there. So, I don't think she was there that long, but it was quite instrumental.
- Mr Haggar:** **From what I understand, there was as gathering of the senior managers of the department with the head of the public service at that time, and he walked into the room and looked around and commented about the fact that there wasn't a single woman present.**
- Ms Ryan: She was very assertive and very clear about her role, her mission.
- Mr Haggar:** **So, you're meeting as a caucus, you're encouraging people to stand, and also to get training? Trade union training became available?**
- Ms Ryan: Yeah. All that. How to move, how to do things. So, there was a lot of discussion. There was a lot of cake eating too.
- Mr Haggar:** **Mentoring of people who were interested in seeking promotion?**
- Ms Ryan: Yes. That became part of it. I mean that wouldn't have been done at a meeting. That would have been done on a one to one individual basis.
- Mr Haggar:** **It's been put to me at one particular point that there was a gathering to discuss union elections, and a decision was made to put up a female candidate and volunteers were called for.**
- Ms Ryan: That's right. It was not part of our make-up to put yourself forward, so that was an unusual thing. It happened within the Labor party too. These caucuses were happening at the same time. And so, somebody would put their hand up. Like Susan Ryan put her hand up for the Senate. Women's Electoral Lobby was very instrumental inside the Labor party, and in doing that sort of thing. And, I don't think WEL had a separate connection with the union stuff. That I think was quite different. And, I don't think terribly many of them would have been members of the Women's Electoral Lobby, the unionists, but it certainly was true in the ALP. There were some overlaps,

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famous ones. Liz Kentwell, now, she's very important too. She ended up working in the union office for a long time. She's a member of my branch now. I'm terrible with names. Liz Kentwell. Talk to Liz. Liz is very important in this story.

Mr Haggar: **Why do you think that?**

Ms Ryan: Because she was very much a WEL person with a very clear agenda, and very good organiser and clear thinker. And, very active in the union group.

Mr Haggar: **And, she actually replaced me as an organiser.**

Ms Ryan: Did she? Well that was much later. This is early days. The other one who was fantastic in this group, who's dead, she was wonderful. She did Common Ground, that housing thing. A primary teacher. She died of cancer a couple of years ago. You'll know who I mean. I can see her at that early meeting actually. She was terribly active in the union, and a great supporter of Cheryl O'Connor as well. Liz Dawson. She's very important. But anyway, you won't be able to talk to her, because she died untimely from cancer.

Mr Haggar: **Rosemary Richards was very involved in the early days.**

Ms Ryan: She was very involved in all of this stuff. I mean this group was a big supporter of Rosemary's campaign to be secretary. That was very active.

Mr Haggar: **Well, that was interesting from a historical point of view, in that you had two women battling it out for the position of secretary. Rosemary and Helga McPhee. Helga won a six-month vacancy, and then Rosemary defeated her for the two year position. Of course, Rosemary went on – she did a period of I think it was a year as secretary and then of course became President and was President for nine years.**

Ms Ryan: Yes. And, when I say we supported Rosemary, I mean that would have been an individual thing. But we didn't have any formal thing. The organisation was not formal. Although we called ourselves a caucus, we operated as a caucus. We didn't have minutes or do anything, and there were no convenors, there were no – it was all just social gathering.

Mr Haggar: **So, not organised campaigning?**

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Ms Ryan: Well, no. I suppose not. Informal campaigning, we would say. Informal campaigning.

Mr Haggard: And, of course Rosemary was unopposed, apart from those two elections that I mentioned.

Ms Ryan: Yeah. That's right. Once she was established – yeah.

Mr Haggard: She was subsequently unopposed.

Ms Ryan: That's right. Well, people thought she did such a good job. And, having got that, it was as good look for other things.

Mr Haggard: So, it's a function in a sense of what was happening in the broader society as you've outlined, in terms of WEL, the ALP.

Ms Ryan: In a way, I think – talking about the broader society, I think as teachers we were slightly ahead. As I said earlier, in '72 we weren't even anywhere, but within a couple of years – it's like Marx said once. Millions will change overnight. And, in a way, that's what happened. The Zeitgeist sort of took over. But I think were we in step with what was happening in the public service? I don't know how much we were in the same or even slightly ahead. Because we had a smaller organisation to work within than the whole of the public service.

Mr Haggard: And, certainly the three years of the Whitlam government opened up the public service.

Ms Ryan: Yeah, that did. People like Gail Radford and Liz Reid, whose positions were the promotion of the interests of women within the public service etcetera. So, that helped a lot. We didn't have such a person. Though I think in a way Rosemary's gender equity position (jointly funded by the Authority and the union) was quite a catalyst for change. That became a catalyst for change, I think.

Mr Haggard: I can remember Rosemary telling me that she was once asked by a senior person in the department after six months in the role whether or not she'd fixed the gender issue.

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- Ms Ryan: That's right. 'You've fixed it now, so you can stop working'. Yes. It was ridiculous.
- Mr Haggar: So, I mean you were a very active councillor as well in the latter years. Is there any comment you'd like to make about the role of council and – I mean there were things done structurally, like the end of annual conference and - - -**
- Ms Ryan: I sort of thought in my sort of feminist role in the council was just to keep an eye on – keeping a gender balance on stuff that was done in committees and promotions and so forth. I mean I was just as actively involved in everybody's conditions and so forth. I mean it was not just – I wasn't tunnel visioned.
- Mr Haggar: Early on in the history of the union of course, there was a major industrial dispute which led to a large proportion of the workforce being suspended from duty under the CEEP Act.**
- Ms Ryan: I was overseas then.
- Mr Haggar: You missed out on that?**
- Ms Ryan: I didn't get to be CEEPED or anything. People had badges, 'I've been CEEPED,' and all this, and I missed the whole thing. What year was that?
- Mr Haggar: That was in 82. It was March of '82.**
- Ms Ryan: I was teaching women's studies at ANU in '81 and '82. That's why I missed out on it. No. I wasn't overseas. I was in another position.
- Mr Haggar: And, you were on leave without pay while you did that?**
- Ms Ryan: Yeah. I just took leave without pay.
- Mr Haggar: And, that was granted happily?**
- Ms Ryan: I didn't have any problem. I went back to teaching. They did offer me – but it was – I was a single parent, and I had an eye on my superannuation and all that. My pay as a master teacher, as I was then, was better than the ANU lowly rate - - -

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Mr Haggar: **I think this has been one of the interesting historical circumstances, that teachers have tended to be better paid than academics.**

Ms Ryan: Well, also you're more secure as well. I mean it was the security as much as anything. So, I just took it on as a thing to do for a year or two that was a bit different.

Mr Haggar: **And, you never considered teaching in a secondary college?**

Ms Ryan: I did teach in a secondary college.

Mr Haggar: **Lake Ginninderra. Of course.**

Ms Ryan: I was there for six years. In fact, that was the best job in the world. History. It took me a couple of years, but I took over all the history teaching, nearly all the history teaching. I mean I also used to teach media and English, but I managed to sort of gradually move out of that and just do history with and everything. And, I thought I'd last there until I left, but suddenly after six years I suddenly thought if I have to mark another history essay in my life, I can't cope. So, I was looking for other things there, and then I went into the department as curriculum officer, which I really liked. And, that was good, because I got to know a lot of the primary social science teachers. That was fantastic. They were such good people, Kate Sutherland and people like that. Wendy Cave.

Mr Haggar: **Given the separation of primary and secondary in the early years of the system, do you think that there were significant cultural differences between primary and secondary?**

Ms Ryan: Yes. I think there were, and people like Cheryl O'Connor – and Liz Dawson. They were very, very militant about the lesser role, the lesser status, the lower status, of what they saw as people – and it's true. There was as culture of that. And, they made us confront it, and we had to really change our thinking.

Mr Haggar: **Well, of course primary parity of salary for promotion positions was a significant issue.**

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Ms Ryan: Primary parity was a huge – and that became part of the women’s thing too. Because Rosemary came out of primary, as well as Cheryl and Liz Dawson. And, they were so strong on this, that we secondary snooty people had to change our – and we couldn’t sustain it. But that was very important. But to have people like that confronting you, you certainly gave it up.

Mr Haggar: I can remember Liz Dawson’s work on eligibility and gender.

Ms Ryan: She was fantastic. She was like that after she retired. She went into the public service didn’t she, and then she retired, because she had multiple, multiple cancers which she fought to the end. Just not long before she died, she talked me into talking my dentist into giving the homeless free dental treatment. I mean she was so indefatigable in every way, and she moved out of teaching, she had established Common Ground here in the ACT for homeless people. Gosh, she was so amazing. But she was such a standard bearer in those days, those early days.

Mr Haggar: So, one of the events of the early years which is going to have to be addressed, was the election of Cathy Robertson and Joan Corbett as our first set of female senior officers, yet within a matter of months Cathy faced a no confidence motion on executives that was supported before it was overruled by council. And, obviously I’ll be talking to Cathy and some of the other people involved in that, but to what degree do you think that was gender related?

Ms Ryan: I think it was gender related. I can remember at the same time there were similar things – we were putting through the equal opportunity policy, or I think that was a little after.

Mr Haggar: That came later.

Ms Ryan: Came later. But the sort of forces that were organised against the EEO were the sort of forces that were against – the point was about Cathy had some difficulties in her personal relations, and the forces who were against feminist activity in the union were able to use that kind of lukewarm support for Cathy from some elements, and I’m sure that it would be overturned by council because council – the women in the council saw the importance of a woman being supported. So, that’s why I think that would have happened.

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- Mr Haggar:** **And, after council made its decision, I think that as an issue that disappeared.**
- Ms Ryan: It did. It did. And, I mean that was almost a divide and rule sort of thing that happened there. But it only happened that once. Those forces were quite – I remember some men I'd worked with in the union forever got so frightened of the women's activity, women's organisation, and fought to the bitter end. In fact, a couple of them resigned from the union over the EEO policy.
- Mr Haggar:** **This was something that came to its head with the appointment of Cheryl O'Connor to Lake Ginninderra College, and we had the one and only 'Members Meeting' at the AIS. You might remember that.**
- Ms Ryan: It was a fantastic meeting. We won it though didn't we.
- Mr Haggar:** **The irony of that was - - -**
- Ms Ryan: I remember Rosemary running it like this fishbowl set up.
- Mr Haggar:** **But it was won by calling the quorum. And, Cheryl's supporters vacated the room, because that meant there was no chance of the quorum, the levels of which had been established by Peter O'Connor.**
- Ms Ryan: That's right. We must have done a lot – planned or – yeah. That was clever.
- Mr Haggar:** **But there were certainly high levels of outrage by the secondary school principals and - - -**
- Ms Ryan: There was. I think the very people who were so hostile would probably look back now and think 'What on earth was I on about?' Because I think that people did change. I mean I have had it within my own acquaintance and family. People ten years later would deny they ever felt like that, because society has moved on so much. But that was very bitter. It was bitter - - -
- Mr Haggar:** **We had a few moments. The abortion debate was another one that created some difficulty.**
- Ms Ryan: Yeah. All that. John – what was his name?
- Mr Haggar:** **Well, you had several Johns. John Bevan, John Anderson?**

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Ms Ryan: John Anderson. I always thought that was such a loss, that he resigned from executive and council over that. But anyway, he stopped being an activist after that, and he'd been such an activist.

Mr Haggar: Yes. He resigned from executive.

Ms Ryan: I thought that was really sad. He was so – I don't know what they thought was going to happen.

Ms Ryan: It would be quite interesting. Are you going to talk to some of those people?

Mr Haggar: Yes.

Ms Ryan: Good. See what they think. See if they've changed – see if they deny what they did. But I'd be interested to hear.

Mr Haggar: I think to paraphrase one male activist, his comment was something along the lines of 'My career is in the dustbin of history'.

Ms Ryan: I can remember at Lake Ginninderra College, one of the young male teachers, a maths teacher he was, was in morning tea when we used to all get together. He complained. Something came up, and he said 'No use applying for a job. The women are getting all the jobs'. I said – the one thing in my whole life – you know when you have a sudden thing – I said, 'If only that were true,' which was good, because it sort of defused the whole thing.

Mr Haggar: Well, is there any other points you'd like to draw my attention to?

Ms Ryan: Probably a lot will occur to me later Clive. As things occur to me – with this latest stuff, I may have stuff in my diary. I started to keep a diary fairly religiously after about 1973, so I might have stuff on this, which I have forgotten.

Mr Haggar: Were you involved in the peace movement at all?

Ms Ryan: No. I wasn't. I wasn't one of those. That was the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (established in the Hague in 1915), Margaret Bearman and people like that. I mean you can't be in everything Clive. You haven't got the time.

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Mr Haggar: **No, you can't, as I have recognised over the years. Well, what I might do Julia, is bring this discussion to a close at this stage.**

Ms Ryan: Okay.

Mr Haggar: **Thank you very much.**

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[End of Transcript]