

CPM Reviews

Transcript: Research Interview

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Speaker Index

Identifier	Name / Position	Role
Mr Haggar:	Mr Clive Haggar, Researcher	Interviewer
Mr Geary:	Mr Jack Geary, Former Activist Member	Interviewee
Mrs Geary:	Ms Robin Geary, Former Activist Member	Interviewee

Start of Transcript

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Mr Haggar: It's the 20th November 2019 and I'm with Jack and Robin Geary. Jack and Robin were activist members of the ACT Teachers Federation and the AEU for decades. And they've very kindly agreed to chat today about the – particularly about the early years of teaching and being union members and activists.

So thanks again, and if I could ask you both, perhaps starting with you Robin, to talk about your early years as teaching – as a teacher, and of course the fact is that you had your first connections with the New South Wales Teachers Federation when you were in training.

Mrs Geary: We were encouraged to join the union. My father certainly always said join the union. And when we went – finished, you know, the training, they said three things we had to remember, join the union, make sure you've got your

own coffee cup and keep it, and don't ever forget your membership number. Which is all pretty good advice, it's come in handy.

But we did the four-year course, the three year arts and then the DipEd. I don't think they prepared us very well for teaching at all. We didn't get much help; we were just more or less turned out to teach.

Mr Haggar: **And what was your first year of teaching?**

Mrs Geary: Kiama.

Mr Haggar: **No, that was your first posting, but what was your first year?**

Mrs Geary: Oh, well that was my...

Mr Geary: 1960.

Mr Haggar: **1960.**

Mrs Geary: 1960, sorry, yep.

Mr Haggar: **And you both retired in...?**

Mrs Geary: '93.

Mr Geary: July '93.

Mrs Geary: When they had the big shake down.

Mr Haggar: **The redundancy program...?**

Mrs Geary: The redundancy.

Mr Geary: The golden handshake.

Mrs Geary: When, you know, so many people were going to go and three times as many applied and they let everybody go and we ended up with no middle management people and most of us got jobs back where we'd been before in a few years.

Mr Haggar: **As temporary or casual teachers?**

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Mrs Geary: As temporary and casual, yeah.

Mr Haggar: Yes.

Mrs Geary: But paying twice as much super, which was a really nice thing.

Mr Haggar: So, Jack, with you, your first connections with the New South Wales Teachers Federation, again, were when you were training?

Mr Geary: That's correct, yeah.

Mr Haggar: And it was generally expected that just everybody would join in those days.

Mr Geary: Well certainly at Newcastle Teachers College the – the staff – the principal in particular, but the staff were very supportive and adamant about how – how important it can be belonging to the union because of the susceptibility of teachers to getting into legal problems and that sort of thing. Things that as a student you probably wouldn't even think about, but – but we are vulnerable. And as I said to you earlier I felt that not to belong to the union, you'd have to be an absolute idiot because things get said about teachers, and the climate now of course about child abuse and all that sort of thing, it makes this very, very clear. But even then, it was we were warned about the risks that were involved in being in such a public position as a schoolteacher.

Mr Haggar: So, you've met each other at university and did you both get the same work placement after you finished your studies?

Mrs Geary: No. I went – well I went to Kiama, is that what you mean?

Mr Haggar: Yes.

Mrs Geary: Yep, and John went to Singleton.

Mr Geary: No, I never actually went.

Mrs Geary: No, because I was going out with someone who went to Sydney so we played chess and he was sent to Bulli and we got rid of the Sydney end of it, and thereafter we had a year hanging around together, courting. No, it was the end of that year. I stayed around at – well, I still was teaching at Dapto

and that but in the following year we had a baby and sort of left for quite a while.

Mr Haggar: **And – and this was country service, wasn't it?**

Mr Geary: It was.

Mrs Geary: Yes, it was, yeah.

Mr Haggar: **Which was virtually compulsory for new graduates?**

Mrs Geary: Yes, I had asked because I was doing a masters degree in Latin, which I loved, Silver Age Latin and the translation from there to Church Latin and things like that, and asked to be sent any place where I could study so they sent me to Kiama. And I think that was probably very sensible, I couldn't have managed to do it, and I'd lost interest anyway. And then I got into the courtship, the marriage, the children, and teaching was what I did, I was – I come from a family of teachers. My mother was a teacher and each way up we've all been – back four, five generations, have been either teachers or nurses.

Mr Geary: Can I just add that her mother did her student practice teaching at Braidwood Primary.

Mrs Geary: Yep, and then Cooks Hill in Newcastle. So, yeah, it was always just partly assumed that I'd be teaching, and I was happy with that, it suited me.

Mr Haggar: **A nice profession for women, I've heard it described as.**

Mrs Geary: I think so. Except when my father remarried my stepmother wanted all these medical things I could go into and meet a nice young doctor. But I did teaching anyway.

The first couple of years were hard because we really didn't have any guidance much. I was thrown into teaching Latin, which was fine, except teaching coal miner's sons Latin wasn't always the easiest thing to do, and they used to just bypass me and ask questions that led me up the garden path. But history's what I settled for and I liked that.

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Mr Haggar: So in terms of the curriculum at the time, being New South Wales in the '60s it was a very directed curriculum, but you did have the introduction of the Wyndham Scheme and the extension of secondary education to 12 years.

Mrs Geary: I never got past the junior high school, or later.

Mr Haggar: In terms of the students you taught?

Mrs Geary: The ones I taught; I didn't ever have a senior class. And I was busy enough I suppose, I liked, and I still like, the junior high school in Canberra, it's always been a junior high school. I've no desire to go to the colleges. I like the kids, you know, Year 8 girls, Year 9 boys can be sometimes a bit feral, but they're open and you'll get much more than you would at the college, I think.

Mr Haggar: So, you did your early years in New South Wales and then you had some overseas experience which included Papua New Guinea.

Mrs Geary: Yep.

Mr Geary: We were in New Guinea from '64 to '67 and then...We went to Canada at the end of '66, we were in Canada from '67 to '72, in Alberta for the first year, and then we were in the Northwest Territories.

Mr Haggar: And you were union members in both Papua New Guinea and in Canada?

Mrs Geary: Oh yes.

Mr Geary: That's correct, yes.

Mr Haggar: Was the culture different at all? Or, as far as classroom teachers were concerned, and union membership was concerned, fairly similar to what existed in New South Wales?

Mrs Geary: I think so, but there wasn't much activity, it was just something you did and was there as part of your work, to be part of the union.

Mr Geary: The thing that interested me in Canada was the taxation system for people who sent their kids to school. When you filled out your tax return you had to

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indicate whether you were sending your kids to a state school or a private school and you were taxed accordingly. You knew right from scratch how much of your taxes went to so called independent schools and how much went towards the government schools. I thought that was a pretty good scheme. I think it was called the Ran Principle. I might be wrong on that.

Mrs Geary: Then of course when you got to places like Montreal the public schools were the Catholic schools because it was different...

Mr Haggar: Majority population being Catholic.

Mrs Geary: Majority populations, but once we'd – we'd been in the union for a while and it just seemed to be quite a good job, and responsibility – if you didn't have any active part, but as a member – and in meetings or anything like that, but it was there if you needed them.

Mr Haggar: So, you came to Canberra in 1975?

Mrs Geary: Yes.

Mr Haggar: This is with the creation of the new – of the Commonwealth Teaching Service and the new system under the Schools Authority?

Mrs Geary: Yes. it was an interim authority.

Mr Haggar: Interim authority, that's right. And what were your postings at that time?

Mrs Geary: I was sent to – well I applied – I was sent to – where was it? Down the coast, Oak Flats High. I asked for a library job because I'd been doing that a bit in Canada, at Rampuri. And they gave me three weeks training in Sydney, it was alright, and then gave me the library posting I wanted so I was doing library pretty well all the time.

Mr Haggar: At which – at which school?

Mrs Geary: At Oak Flats High.

Mr Haggar: Oh, so you were still attached to the New South Wales system?

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Mrs Geary: Oh yes, yep. And we were there, and then when we heard about Canberra and we were looking for placement for our boys who needed special placement anyway, we thought we'd apply. And John was interested in the college part of it and I was interested in just going along. I didn't get a school straight away but then I – where was I? Where did I go? I went to Woden Valley School.

Mr Haggar: **Woden Valley High School?**

Mrs Geary: To Woden Valley, and someone at Woden Valley hated it – no, someone at Ginninderra hated Ginninderra. I wasn't comfortable with Woden because the principal didn't matter, he was a very difficult man and he trusted his ancillary staff and they ran the show. So, when I found out someone wanted to come there and I thought Ginninderra would be good, we just did a swap and he said he couldn't care less who was there. So, we moved, and I had 20 years nearly at Ginninderra and I loved it, it was good.

Mr Haggar: **And John you wound up in part of the foundation staff at Hawker College.**

Mr Geary: Yes, I did, but just let's get back to New Guinea for a moment. I was seconded to Papua New Guinea and there was no teachers' union there.

Mrs Geary: Wasn't there?

Mr Geary: But the public service union, I forget what it was called, is what I joined, and if you wanted to belong you were obliged to join that union. Coming back to what happened here, we arrived back in Australia from Canada on 28th November 1972.

Mrs Geary: In time for the election.

Mr Geary: We missed out getting on the roles by six hours, okay? We tried, we knew what was happening, it's one of the things that brought us back, was the Whitlam election. We knew what was – well we thought we knew what was going to happen, and it did happen. And we couldn't actually vote in that election. So, five days later we went down to Newcastle and applied for a teaching position, went through the interview and stuff like that, in – what's the street? Burke Street? Not Burke Street. Anyway...

Mrs Geary: It doesn't matter, the appropriate place.

Mr Geary: And I was offered a position at Corrimal High School. My first appointment in New South Wales had been Bulli High. I was offered an appointment there and I was taken on as a supernumerary, the understanding being that if I turned up for work on the first day of the new school year in '73 I would get permanent employment, which is what happened. So, I was paid over the Christmas holidays as well as having the promise of a position after that.

Taught at Corrimal High School for a year and then family considerations came into it. We had children with – two boys with special needs, and we'd sort of investigated the situation and decided that Canberra was the way to go. It was the Whitlam period, that's what brought us across here and it wasn't a mistake. We were very fortunate, basically, in getting the facilities that are available for the – for the boys, here. So that's what brought us here.

My first appointment was Deakin High School and of course in 1975 the college system was being set up. And to be quite honest I wasn't happy about the idea of the college system because, like Robin, I enjoyed having a range of ages, I really did, and I knew that I'd miss having the Year 7s, 8s, 9s, that sort of thing. But as we were being put in a position where we had to make some sort of decision I opted for the college system and that's where I worked for 18 years, at Hawker College, with the exception of the year that I swapped positions to Phillip College.

Mr Haggart: You went to Phillip College for 1981.

Mr Geary: Phillip College as it was then. I should mention too that we are both still members of the Australian Education Union, as retired teachers we still pay a nominal fee and we still get the publications, the newsletters, that sort of stuff.

Mr Haggart: With the early years of the – as the Teachers Federation, or Commonwealth Teachers Federation (ACT) as it was then called, you're in the interesting situation of having a new system, commonwealth employment, and a new – brand new union. Do you think that there were substantial differences in those early years between what you'd

experience with New South Wales Teachers Federation and the ACT Teachers Federation?

Mrs Geary: Oh yes. We were more experienced as teachers, and NSW was not as active. You didn't have much need, but you knew that the union was there if you needed it. Obviously, there were things to be discussed with the establishment of a new system and a new union.

Mr Geary: I think it was pretty similar. When I was at Bulli High School I was what was the councillor, New South Wales Teachers Federation Union councillor, and I used to go up to the meetings once a month I think it was, in Sydney, from Bulli, and I didn't notice any great difference when I came down – when I came to Canberra some years later.

Mr Haggar: So the same sorts of focus on working conditions obviously, but occasional issues like class sizes and – of course, you know, '68 you would have been overseas when you had the first teacher's strike in New South Wales?

Mr Geary: In '68 we were.

Mrs Geary: Yes, we were in Canada.

Mr Geary: We were overseas.

Mr Haggar: Right.

Mr Geary: We hardly heard any news from Australia when we were in Canada, apart from news about a mice plague in Victoria.

Mrs Geary: Or when a kangaroo hopped in someone's office or something. That was it.

Mr Haggar: That's the level of contact you had with news about Australia. Okay, so we've got the early years of the union and you've subsequently worked with some of the people who had a very significant role to play in the establishment of the union, Dick Lee was one of these people, our first elected president.

Mr Geary: That's right.

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Mr Haggar: **And Peter O'Connor, who was the first full-time secretary, Keith – Keith Lawler came along as a – as president. I mean, one of the things that is quite striking about those early years is the fact that most of the activists and certainly the executive senior officers were male and it wasn't until...**

Mrs Geary: That's the way things were.

Mr Haggar: **That's the way – and that's...**

Mrs Geary: Most of the principals were...

Mr Haggar: **Were male. In fact, there were no female secondary principals at all until the '80s. But I think that notion that you've just expressed of it being that's the way it was, Robin, did you feel a degree of frustration in terms of the lack of female leadership?**

Mrs Geary: No. I – I felt a little bit – a fair bit annoyed the fact that a male was always in charge of completely – almost completely female primary school. That's when – acted like – seemed to act like secretaries bowing to the boss. That's probably not with everybody but there was a real control, I think, by the one male who was in charge. It wasn't so much in the secondaries, but I don't remember even a female Level 2. There would have been some.

Well when I went to Ginninderra, just – there wasn't much activity in the union, no-one wanted to, so I put my hand up and they said, go ahead, do it. And just each year I said do you want me to keep going? Yep, yep, yep. Just one year a male on staff stood up and said I think we should vote on this, so I said fair enough, and no-one voted for him. So, it worked.

Mr Haggar: **So, you had a contested election.**

Mrs Geary: Well, they didn't want to do it particularly, and I thought the role was important in the school and worthwhile for me to do it. I was at that stage now fully in the library. I had an enclosed area and the number of people that came and sat in that room frustrated, a couple of men in tears, people just came and talked and talked, and just cried their hearts out sometimes about conditions in the school, what people were doing, what was happening. That I thought was very, very important, I never talked about them because, you

know, a lot of was pretty personal, family and legal and all sorts of things, but that's where I think the role was particularly was valuable.

Mr Haggard: **And they talked – and they talked to you as a union representative.**

Mrs Geary: Yep, I was a Level 1.

Mr Haggard: **Classroom teacher.**

Mrs Geary: Alan Casimir, the Principal said I was Level 1.5 which meant I was doing Level 2 work but paid Level 1. But having that private area, it was – it was really good, I just appreciated that. And I was friendly with everybody, just about.

Mr Geary: What was his son's name? Johnathan wasn't it?

Mrs Geary: Johnathan, yep.

Mr Geary: Johnathan was a Hawkers College student and he came up to me at the end of his year there and he said Jack, I want to shake your hand. I said why is that Johnathan? He said you are the first teacher I have had, who in the whole two years I've been in your classes and stuff like that, you've never reminded me once that my father is a school principal. If I'd thought of it, I certainly would have. I was amused by that.

Mr Haggard: **So, in terms of representation of member's concerns at council were there particular policy issues over the decades that you were there that engaged you? Or essentially were you there, as you saw it, having a watching brief and reporting back to members?**

Mrs Geary: I think a watching brief. I always had a need for council, what about – people just sat there, oh yeah, whatever, you go and do it. They weren't that interested, but they knew they were being represented. And I'd come back in and if there were things there, I could tell them. It was easy to have a meeting because they'd just, you know, come, they'd always come, it was quite a good school that way.

Mr Haggard: **So, there's a significant degree of trust in you as a councillor.**

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Mrs Geary: I think so, especially – well I was there, 15 years or 18 years , I was just part of the furniture, but that's the way it worked and I think they trusted me.

It was interesting because at one stage I went around – I decided I'd take a photo of everybody to put up on a board in the staff room just, you know, for identification. When I looked at them 95% of them looked me in the eye and smiled. I could tell the ones that didn't like me or didn't like what I was doing because they looked away, you know. It was just very interesting.

Mr Haggar: Interesting exercise.

Mr Geary: I hadn't heard that story.

Mrs Geary: Oh. It wasn't a big story.

Mr Haggar: So, Jack, in terms of the college environment, I mean the colleges were targeted in the early years and subsequently for staff losses, was that a motivating exercise trying to protect the secondary staffing budgets for teachers at Hawker?

Mr Geary: Well there was concern about it but I can't remember specifically what form that took.

Mr Haggar: I was just thinking in terms of some of the disputes that were had about wages, particularly in '82, '83, where you had an ongoing dispute about salaries that led eventually to the suspension of the workforce under the CEEP Act, and that would have impacted

Mrs Geary: We were all sort of sacked. Sack me, sack the lot.

Mr Haggar: How did that feel? Both of you were classroom teachers, you saw your employment being threatened.

Mr Geary: I do remember that one of my colleagues at Hawker was asked, when we all went on strike to attend the stopwork meeting at the AIS, was asked by the employer to supply the names of those few who fronted up for work, which he did, and it didn't make him very popular with his colleagues, I can promise you that.

I think we had very strong support from the membership during that period.

Mrs Geary: Yeah, almost everybody went out, but there were a couple that turned up to work.

Mr Haggard: But, if you look at in terms of the industrial campaigns that have been held over the decades that stands out because you were taking on the Commonwealth government. They were using what's fair to be described as draconian legislation to suspend the workforce and they suspended an initial group in Northern Belconnen, and then everybody else went out in an overwhelming show of support...

Mr Geary: Yes.

Mr Haggard: So it was a demonstration of solidarity, but interestingly enough the Arbitration Commission, as it was then called, the Fair Work Commission today, had the capacity, the power to actually step in and intervene, and then determine salary outcomes, which is not a power that they have today. And that led very quickly to resolution of that dispute. But nevertheless, I mean, you were sitting with the possibility of loss of your family income and yet you were still prepared to take industrial action.

Mrs Geary: I think had they just – they collared a group, or a small group, and put them out, maybe it would have happened. But the feeling was one out, all out, it really did go like that. And try and sack the lot of us. Okay, sack these 200, whatever they are, I don't know how many teachers we had.

Mr Haggard: Initially it was 400.

Mrs Geary: 400, sack us all and then what are you going to do?

Mr Haggard: 400 in the first day and 2,700...

Mrs Geary: They could start putting everybody in jail. They just can't do it, not effectively anyway.

Mr Haggard: It's significant too of course because you look at the nearest kind of action being taken along those lines was the SEQEB dispute around the same time in Queensland when Jo Bjelke-Petersen was premier, he

dismissed the entire striking workforce of the then government owned electricity system.

Mrs Geary: The thing is though, what's he going to do next? What can he do next? He puts himself in a position...

Mr Haggard: Nobody went back. No-one was ever reemployed out of that, and eventually they privatised it.

Mrs Geary: Well that's more serious.

Mr Haggard: So, in terms of – of the union's engagement with social policy and, you know, political action during your time, were there issues that particularly stood out for you?

Mrs Geary: I don't remember it particularly. John, what do you think?

Mr Geary: I think it was all 30-40 years ago.

Mr Haggard: A bit of a stretch.

Mrs Geary: When things were wrong, we sort of tried to patch them. A lot of the disputes were around wages and protecting conditions.

Mr Geary: Certainly, at Hawker the membership there, the staff there, were very supportive of what was going on in terms of union action.

Mrs Geary: I think my staff wanted to know, made their own minds up what they would do.

Mr Haggard: Of course, eventually Ginninderra closed because of lack of enrolment numbers and you had...

Mrs Geary: I don't understand why it did because they'd just spent thousands of dollars upgrading the kitchens, the work areas.

Mr Geary: The same thing happened at Kambah High School.

Mrs Geary: It wasn't falling down; it was a good school. When I first started there and it was Dave Southern, or after Alan Casimir there may have been someone else. The enrolments were all in area and we were blocked to the gills. You

know, I think we were about – if it was built for something like 800, we had 1,000.

Mr Haggart: **Yes, I remember when you had 1,000 students there.**

Mrs Geary: I remember Bea Thompson being afraid because kids are pushing each other up and down stairways. We had to have separate times for the breakfast program, and for lunch, and all sorts of things, because there were too many kids. Why it died off, I don't know. When I left there there was still over 200 in the Year 10 in my final year with them. And then I was so disappointed to see it close. I got very fond of the school, the Big G.

Mr Haggart: **Yeah, when it did close it's projected the enrolments for the following year was only 90 students.**

Mrs Geary: What happened then?

Mr Haggart: **Well, I think it was a function of demographics, competition with the private schools.**

Mrs Geary: The private school probably had something to do with it. But that's from 1,000 down to 100.

Mr Haggart: **Yes, but that's over quite a number of years.**

Mrs Geary: But they were still flourishing when I left.

Mr Haggart: **Yeah, and you had a similar impact in the local primary school. Out of the three schools that were...**

Mrs Geary: That's Holt Primary was it?

Mr Haggart: **Yes, out of the three schools that were amalgamated you were in a situation where two of them were really residual...**

Mrs Geary: And yet they could build that other school, Kingsford Smith, which must have got many of the population.

Mr Haggart: **Well it – it was designed to attract more students back into the public system. But the – I'm just thinking in terms of your experiences**

because both of you worked as relief after you took your voluntary redundancies, how did you find life as a relief teacher compared to what it had been for you as permanent members of staff?

Mrs Geary: John taught more Japanese than anyone I know. I was alright because I had library. Library was – there was no-one around.

Mr Haggar: You had long term placements at Kaleen High School.

Mrs Geary: Kaleen I ended up for three years, but even the other ones, they'd phone, and ask could I come? Yes, yes, I can come. Or another school, no, I'm busy, because I didn't want to go to that school. I tried at the – I applied to Merici College (a private girls' school) at one stage and I got there and I told them no, look it's a mistake, I don't want to do this. That was when my little one had cancer and it was a lot to think about. But they said, look we can give you this class, we can do that. It was, you know, very intriguing, it would have been interesting.

Mr Geary: It was farcical being a relief teacher. I used to think in terms of looking at my timetable thinking to myself how many tricks do I have to perform today? We were being paid good money for doing stuff that was just not much connected with the education of these kids.

Mr Haggar: You're saying it's was a babysitting role, in your experience?

Mr Geary: Absolutely.

Mrs Geary: It wasn't with me because I was the librarian and one of the senior ones there and they really wanted someone who could look after the place. I enjoyed it.

Mr Haggar: Everywhere across...

Mr Geary: I don't think I did any primary. I did in Canada actually. The first appointment I had was a substitute teacher. And I remember being in my first primary school there, which was only a couple of blocks away from where we were living, and they put me with this group of, I don't know, five-year olds I suppose they were. And it came to coffee break, and I hopped in the car, raced home and brought back a koala bear – a stuffed koala bear, a big one.

And I thought, you know, this is a conversation thing, and I passed it around the kids and every one of those little boys and girls checked the genital area I thought that was wonderful. And when I left Grande Prairie I'd been in every school in the system, and I think I had a better idea of how the system worked than probably a lot of my colleagues there who had been working there for years.

Mr Haggar: **That's an interesting point because one of the things that a lot of people have discovered over the years through their membership and participation on council, and even more so on executive, is that you actually got a great deal of insight into the operations of the system. And some of the policy debates that took place – I was just thinking, for example, around the mobility issue back in the '80s where for the first time it was determined that people should gain experience in more than one school over their teaching career. That was – that generated an awful lot of division between – particularly in the secondary area – between high school teachers and college teachers.**

Mrs Geary: Well if you knew you were coming back it would be alright. But I lost – twice I lost a good teacher to the colleges.

Mr Haggar: **Right.**

Mrs Geary: But I was given a one term contract while on relief at a primary school, it was way down the other end of town, and that was a real experience. It was like being in an aviary with clutching your knees all the time. And, you know, they said this is storytelling and I had to ask what – you know, a lot of terms in there, I had no idea. Actually, primary school would have been quite nice, but they were very busy, they worked very hard, but it was interesting to experience it.

Mr Geary: One of the bits of advice I would give to people who are considering doing relief teaching is that they don't accept the offers of blocks of six weeks here, six weeks there, which quite often come towards the end of the teaching year, where you not only have the normal problems of being with an unfamiliar group of kids, and taking over in a subject area quite often which is far removed from what you've been involved with, talking secondary, but it

also involves the business of assessment, writing references and all that sort of thing, and fronting up to parent-teacher interviews without knowing in many cases the names of many of your students.

Mr Haggart: **Because of the short-term placement that you've got.**

Mr Geary: That's right, and you're very, very vulnerable in that situation. I'd recommend to anybody who asked that they don't jump to accept the lure of continuous payment over a period of six weeks, or three months, or whatever it happens to be. You're in a very vulnerable position being a relief teacher, and that's another damned good reason to be – remain a member of the union.

Mrs Geary: Well I don't altogether agree with that because I was in a position where any school wanted me, I had choice, they absolutely needed librarians, so I could safely say I'd come for the day. Could you come for a week? This primary school, I forget where it was now, a term, and then next year they phoned up and said could you come for another term? No, I've had enough of that.

Mr Geary: That's when schools had libraries of course.

Mrs Geary: Yes. And I helped set up a few libraries around the place. But if you knew what you were getting into – and then of course I got into Kaleen and two or three times I had to sort of front up and apply for it, and the answer was I'm sorry but someone else is going to be placed here, and the principal would say I'll see what I can do, and then he kept me. But that was a comfortable position for me, but John could be given, as I said, Japanese, or anything, it's a different sort of matter to my experience, I was totally in my own area.

So, it depends on the person, if you're in a demand situation you're safer, I think. And again, probably is always good to be a unionist if they're going to have people challenging you for things. That's one thing, you can sort of say this is what I am, this is what I do. But I was a half-baked counsellor there at times. I've sat a few times in the office and dealt with even the police coming in, when I shouldn't have been given the job as a Level 1, to talk about misbehaviour in school. You know, things that should have been done by the police and the counsellor, but there wasn't anyone there other than me in the library..

Mr Haggar: **This is of course operating in a small high school environment with staff really stretched because of...**

Mrs Geary: Oh yes, they were, they were stretched. That's why I said I often had people sitting in the office sometimes in tears. It was often just relationship with other members of staff or a couple of times there's family problems and things. It was important to have a counsellor, a union person, or a designated person they could safely go to. I think the trust thing comes in there, and that's because I could talk to them all.

Mr Haggar: **This raises another issue in terms of the relationship between classrooms in Sydney and school principals, and the union in the workplace and were the notable differences between the very beginnings of the teacher's union in Canberra and the structure that was then subsequently put in place? They moved from sectorial associations such as the Primary Teachers Association and the Secondary Teachers Association and very quickly moved it to workplace based branches, which then became sub-branches when we formed the national union. But you had that school-based representation and principals working with the representatives in their own school around local issues and obviously systemic issues came into play as well. But did you – did you feel that principals were supportive of your roles as union representatives?**

Mrs Geary: In the last school I was at, and we had weird roles because you'll probably understand people, many of the problems were between staff and principal. The person would come to me and say what have I done wrong? What do you think I ought to do? And I – I didn't always know; it was out of my depth. But, you know, again, it was someone to talk to. I would then speak to the principal and then I'd have to go back to the staff member and said he's not really as bad as he sounded, he didn't mean this, he wants to know – and arrange a meetings.

Mr Haggar: **So you had a facilitator role in trying to improve relations between staff and...**

Mrs Geary: That's how it worked out. I wasn't given the role, that's how it worked.

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Mr Haggar: **Jack, would you...?**

Mr Geary: Certainly, at Hawker, in my time there, and I was there 18 years. The principals were consistently supportive of the union.

Mr Haggar: **Because they saw it as having an important role both in terms of the operation of their school and the operation of the system.**

Did you ever have to use the services of the union office yourselves?

Mr Geary: To solve issues?

Mr Haggar: **Issues in the workplace.**

Mrs Geary: We did once or twice call people in,

Mrs Geary: There were a couple of times I had – and I think you might have been involved but there were a few things like that. But normally, no.

Mr Geary: In a positive way, yes. I remember one staff member, when he came to Hawker — he was in financial difficulties and we were having a conversation and I said have you – have you thought about approaching the union to get a short term loan? And I drew his attention to that likelihood, and he did, and it apparently got him out of the trouble he was in. I don't know what the details were.

Mr Geary: That was in a positive way, it wasn't to sort of resolve an issue that, you know, was of a professional kind I suppose.

Mrs Geary: There were a couple of times we needed – I needed to have someone backing me up, where this person might be facing – whatever, whatever problems, and the union officers came in. I have an idea you came to one of them, but it happened about three times and it's worth doing.

Mr Haggar: **Okay. So, in terms of, you know, your very long career in the ACT system, I think – and your very long involvement with the union, is there any advice that you'd like to give to younger teachers?**

Mrs Geary: Join the union.

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Mr Haggar: **Okay. Well look, on that note, we might bring the formal part of the discussion to close.**

Mr Geary: Okay.

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

[End of Transcript]