CHRISTCHURCH, 15 JULY 2016

A What caused you first to become interested in weaving?

A _____And who taught you to use that?

A _____So was spinning and weaving taught at that stage in schools?

A _____So it was alive at that point and kind of dropped off again?

A Do you have any idea why that might have happened? Was the spinning for the Second World War effort at that time?

And then after that...

A Can you tell me about the Nelson Polytechnic weaving course?

A Who was the teacher that you had at the community class?

A____Were you living in Auckland at that stage?

ANNIE MACKENZIE TALKS TO LYNDSAY FENWICK

L I started spinning – I had an older sister who was very interested in handcrafts and she gave me my first lesson in spinning in 1970 and then I went to classes in about 1974. I got a wheel in 1972 or 1973 and then realised that I needed to learn properly. They were community classes, and the community classes also offered weaving, so I started that in 1979 when my second child was at school. And the community classes were very good.

But I should go right back. We had a simple rigid heddle loom sold or obtained through the schools, the education system. My father was a teacher and we had that loom. Probably my parents got it during the Second World War. And I can remember taking it to school when I was a seven or eight year old. So we had that at home.

L Well it was very, very simple... I don't know, I can't remember. It was probably my sisters. But we only had carpet wool which was very scratchy and you could only weave scarves of a limited length. And you never wore them – dreadful. But I did discover that, that loom did come through the Education Board and was made at an education workshop in Dunedin because I subsequently saw one of them, but in fact we had living across the road from us in the Second World War... a man who made a huge number of spinning wheels, little iron ones, and they're all around New Zealand, they're in collections all over the place, and he actually lived opposite us.

L No, no, I just lugged it along to school and took it you know, just – "This is what I'm doing." But, it must've been... Beeby brought in a curriculum – and he was very advanced in his ideas... [aside to Annie – "You need to look him up."] He was very influential in wanting crafts to happen in schools, and the fact that the Education Board was making these looms means that it must've been taught in schools. And there were spinning wheels made by a guy called Schofield and those wheels were purchased, through schools. That was Second World War because spinning was an important thing then, but weaving... well, the looms were around...

That was from the Second World War and it would've died out probably... I really don't know. I went to secondary school in 1954 but I was in a professional course, so I'm not aware of anything happening in High School at that stage.

L Certainly the spinning dropped off after the Second World War – people didn't want to or need to. It revived probably late-sixties, I think. Perhaps early to mid-sixties. That's when Ashfords came on board again. Because they were left with huge numbers of spinning wheels after the Second World War that no one wanted. Then they had to go back to their original plans, find someone who could make them. I did research into New Zealand spinning wheels and there's a book been published so I'm up on that!

L Absolutely.

L No need. You see there were restrictions but we produced wool in New Zealand that you could knit with. Later on there came imports. But there was Kaiapoi and Aotea... they were knitting wools. There were very few people who would've continued spinning. It's slow. And then there was just this revival of home crafts and that sort of thing later on I think.

L Yes, I was in the last year of that which was 1987. It was only offered once every three years, I think. It was run by Anna Correa-Hunt, who was trained as a weaver in Germany. She had an industrial training for hand-weaving and she was an excellent teacher. She taught theoretically and she ran a three year course that was full time at the Polytech, but the Weaving Certificate course was only once every three years and it was correspondence basically. It was for those who had probably done three years with Anna Correa-Hunt to start with, and then there were the likes of us who had come through from community classes and those people often were self-taught. And I had the good fortune to have for two years a very good teacher and felt that laid the foundation. So in the Polytech course that I did there were six of us who had gone through three years at Nelson and six of us who had just come out of the woodwork.

L Pat King. She's in Auckland and she didn't teach again after that. Then followed by Elaine Blake, who was also a very good theoretical person, but Pat laid very good foundations. These people probably got training through classes at The Handweavers Guild. Auckland Guild was the very first and it's called 'The Handweavers Guild Auckland Inc', because it was the first Guild and it was by correspondence for a lot of people but it was based in Auckland and there were very good people in that. I can't remember when it started up – you'll have to check with the Auckland people. I'm sure they've had sixty years and that would've been two years ago so if you count back that's how long they've been going.

L Yes... So the Polytech course, we went down to Nelson for two weeks and Anna went through all the modules that we'd have to do. There were twelve modules of weaving and I think there must've been twelve of design as well. And we had another person whose name was Catherine Hodgson and she was very good too.

So we had that fortnight, then we were sent home and you had to send these modules in as the time went on. Then we had a week in Christchurch in August, in the August holidays, and we were taken around various people. We did wool classing out at Lincoln and we visited weavers around Christchurch and then at the end of the year in November we had a week in Nelson where we had to actually weave a project on their loom. It was specified so many ends per inch – you know really fine – I wove tea towels, four tea towels in linen and cotton and you started with your loom on a Sunday afternoon. You could do adjustments to it but you couldn't put anything on. You started on the Monday morning getting the warp on and by Friday morning it all had to be woven. The loom I was using I made new heddles for and put them all on, on the Sunday afternoon. It was very hot and dry and Anna found that we were working with linen singles and said, "Oh, these are going to start breaking" and she shot home and she got towels, brought towels back and wet them and put them on the linen so it would make it stronger. It was really quite a challenge, but it's really something to have done that.

A _____And was that in the old wooden building on...

A What was Anna Correa-Hunt like as a person, as a tutor?

A Any of the other tutors memorable to you?

A So was the emphasis more on technique rather than artistic expression?

A _____So you had a loom at home and were weaving full-time to keep up?

A When did the course begin?

A Do you know why it stopped?

And that was in the late eighties?

A _____Did you ever consider being a production weaver?

A Was that for a weaver?

A I want to ask you about the Mulvany sisters and how you got involved in that exhibition.

A____So you were weaving during the exhibition?

L____Yes. And there were umpteen looms there and we, presumably at the beginning of the year, had chosen which looms we wanted to use because they had a great range of looms. So I chose the Loman. I had a Loman at home, a four shaft loom and Loman made looms in Hamilton. They were good little looms, nice little looms

L She started... she seemed to be a bit formidable, German, but she really had your welfare at heart, I think. Later on after we'd finished the course, I found she was coming through Auckland and had time to spend with her husband – she was off overseas – so I picked her and her husband up at the airport, took her home and looked after her... So she wasn't totally stand-offish at all.

L Catherine, Catherine was. She was younger and she was here in Christchurch too. They both checked on how we were going. They wanted to know at the beginning of the course if there were any problems that we might encounter during the year and I had an elderly mother who'd had radical surgery so I had to let them know that because they didn't want anyone dropping out. And of those twelve that started, none of the six who'd already done three years, none of them completed that certificate. And there were only two or three of us that actually passed everything first go – people had to resubmit stuff...

<u>L</u> Ah... probably. One of the modules was a huge number of samples we had to do and those who'd done the three years at Polytech already had all those samples so for the rest of us, that was something that was handed in at the end of the year, so you had to work right through the year to get them all done. I'll show those to you afterwards. I've got a bookshelf full of all the folders... So you can see what they actually did there.

L Yes. And it really was a full-time effort. One of the others on the course was actually a town planning engineer in New Plymouth and I don't know how he managed but he did it, with a full-time job – absolutely staggering... He was the only male. I maintained a very strong friendship with one of the people on that class, Nynke Piebenga who's been President of Creative Fibre. She was on that course. So very strong relationships.

Since then I've met people who did the early courses. I know that the design wasn't particularly good early on. Anna's husband did it and he wasn't... apparently they didn't enjoy him terribly much, but I think Catherine was very good. I found one of my second cousins had been in, I think the first group of weavers and those people some of them went on... Anne Percival is someone... she's in her early eighties now. I've got another friend in Christchurch who was in the very first lot.

L They'd be able to tell you... I don't know. She only ran it five or six times... '87, '77... probably in the early seventies I would've thought. I don't know. I can find out for you if you'd like. My friend certainly was in the first lot.

- Yes, Anna died. She died overseas. Which was really sad.

Cr early nineties. I know that '87 was the last time so, and she was still teaching at that stage I think. And that was totally the end of the weaving at Nelson Polytech. They sold looms and it just got right cleared out. And it went in totally different direction. It's very difficult to make your living... well, you can't really, unless you have a husband that supports you

L_____Not production but for three years I was in what was called 'The Crafts Centre' in Auckland. A group of people took over and paid the rent to a Government building. It was owned by the Rehab League, which was a Government organisation. It became available and we only rented the square footage that we occupied, which was great. There was another weaver with me and we had a big room but we only paid for the bits that we occupied. So there were two weavers there, there was a yarn suppliers, there was a craft bookshop, Books Unlimited, there were potters... a whole range of people. A glass blower was there. He wasn't blowing glass there but he had a workshop there. Jewellers. That was a good place to be and I would do three days a week there so that I was basically just weaving what I wanted to and putting it out on shelves and it would sell. And I was doing production spinning for someone.

L No, no, it was for a woman who was getting a fibre you never hear of now – cashgora – fine cashmere – and she had knitters and was selling the stuff in England. I did a lot of spinning for her.

L_____Angela Lassig was at Auckland Museum at that stage and she came to talk to the Guild, The Handweavers Guild in Auckland, and it would've been about 1993 probably and said that this collection had come and she was wanting help with it. Was there anyone who was interested? And I thought, "Oh, that's something I could be interested in", because The Craft Centre had shut down by that stage. My husband was a university teacher and we had sabbatical in San Francisco, where there was huge weaving – again a community class. A huge number of looms. And there were people in that class who were involved with the De Young Museum of Fine Arts I think it's called, helping with their textiles, so I thought, "Oh yeah, I'll see what I can do."

And I found that the collection, the Mulvany collection, had come from Christchurch. One of their daughters had gifted it to the Museum. And none of it had been touched. And so I started off and started measuring, determining what fibres, looking at the ends per inch, looking at the patterns and so on and describing every piece. I would've done that through to about 1998–99. And then Angela got permission to put the exhibition up for six months and we went through all the pieces and decided together what would go well in an exhibition and the Museum provided the funds to write the catalogue – which you have – so that I did get paid for that.

And the Museum had one of their looms. I first met that loom on Monday morning and the exhibition opened on Friday night. And I had that with new heddles on, a warp on and one piece woven by Friday – just about killed me! Because you couldn't work at night at the Museum – all the power's off, there's no light. Everything gets turned off. And I hadn't realised that. I came in early one day and of course there was no light so that was interesting.

L No. I found that... I tried to tie the beater up so that people wouldn't... And it just wasn't going to work. I didn't really want to weave with linen [under those conditions]... You've got to be absolutely spot on. And I didn't want to weave with people around. So in the end what I did was weave the other two pieces off during time so that people would've been there, but it was over a fairly short time really, probably only a few days.

The photographer came in and took photographs at that stage, of the weaving in progress so those should be around at Auckland Museum. I didn't ever see what he produced. And then it was just left, rolled on and left so that people could see it. But the selvedge threads broke because of people mucking around and so on.

A You mentioned that Auckland Museum got given the textiles, so where had they been beforehand?

A____Did they mostly use linen?

A _____ Then did they import all their threads?

A____Did you weave replicas of what they had done?

A____Their colours are really beautiful.

A I was interested that in the book on the Mulvany sisters, it said that although Taniko Weavers had commercial success and they were trying to popularise weaving that they didn't really kind of kick-start it at that point.

A _____So there was that gap until the Second World War period?

A Previous to them, in the Colonial period, was there hand weaving in a European style?

And do you think that the skill perhaps in the people that came over...

A Do you know what the catalysts would've been in the Second World War period that got weaving going?

A I guess people often refer to the 1970s as the heyday...

A _____And eighties. So why do you think that weaving got popular at that time?

A____Were the Guilds flourishing?

L In her home out in Sumner. Josephine Mulvany, her mother, married and moved to Christchurch and she was weaving here for a bit and I don't know how long that went on for, but she had a huge number of yarns – linens and cottons – so Terry Elliott had all that stored there at her home in Sumner. She's a woman a wee bit younger than me. So she offered all that stuff to Canterbury Museum but they didn't want it. Well, it was a big lot! And so it went to Auckland.

Angela must've seen mention of them and went chasing, I think. She was looking for women active in arts and crafts and they popped up. And then a few more pieces came in from Sybil Mulvany's son. Josephine had two daughters, Sybil had one son.

Sybil went on weaving for longer but they taught one or two people and then they found those people were setting up in opposition, so they refused to teach after that. Apart from Flo Akins who was at the Fine Arts School here and she was teaching weaving at Ilam and Josephine's older daughter, who's now in the States, was in that class, so that was quite interesting. So there was a bit of legacy from the Fine Arts people. Mary Bartlett wove rugs and supported herself weaving. She had trained through Ilam. There's another one... Oh, names go... Elizabeth...[Arnold] Never mind. Again another weaver who's had quite an influence on tapestry weaving. But not many went through in weaving. But that was the legacy of the Mulvany sisters.

Linen and cotton. Their pieces of wool were horrible. They tried to use local wool and it was pretty rough stuff. Not like we get now with a lot of merino. Merino with the scales taken off... And you know they were looking for stuff that had a long shelf life. You need to have a look at it sometime. It's not very nice. Just coarse. They were much better linen and cotton weavers. You've read from the book that they only had three months of tuition and it was half days – it was fairly limited really! So it was amazing to come and set up...

L Yes. Again I think you'll find in the catalogue that they did a deal with Milne & Choyce in Auckland [long since disappeared] and they used to weave in their window sometimes. But they got an import licence through them to get their yarns in because the stuff wasn't available here. You sort of don't realise the import restrictions, you wouldn't realise now just what happened then.

L Only one. And that was on the loom at the Museum. Just because the yarns were there and it was just such a beautiful piece and I thought, "Well, we can do this." It was a very good centrepiece. Yes, I used their linens but in a different way.

I certainly was influenced in some of the linen weaving I did, from what I was seeing with the patterns they used.

And Sybil, in particular, was very good with her use of colours. I meant to say it before: Sybil went on weaving. She kept her loom and she would have people bring the wool to her and of course it was knitting wool and I met someone much later on who had a small piece that Sybil had woven. She produced the wool for her and Sybil had woven it. So Sybil enjoyed keeping on going but Josephine didn't. She's obviously had enough. She said her hands were too rough from gardening. Well, it might have been for the silk, but not for the linen and cotton... so I think that was an excuse.

L Because they wouldn't teach. That's why, I think. They wanted to sell what they produced but you know what Auckland Museum's got is a hell of a lot of stuff. They had an awful lot of stuff left over and I think... You see, they were doing it in the Depression. And they were Roman Catholics and I think they were well-supported by church people. Certainly Bishop Liston wanted curtains that they wove and they were called 'silk' curtains but in fact they were cotton. They were supported by their community really. They had assistants and we were never able to track them although Angela tried really hard to track them and didn't ever manage which was a great pity.

L_____You've also got to realise that during the thirties people were buying imported pieces or doing embroidery for tray cloths, tablecloths – that sort of thing. Bridge cloths. And their work books, their order books, show that sort of thing and they were providing something that was made locally and was handcrafted. And there was still the hangover from the Arts and Crafts [movement] that this was a desirable thing. So that's why that worked, I think. They were doing a few fabric lengths. Their work book is worthwhile having a look at.

L There is the very first one... there is an ancient loom brought in, or used by someone called Fowlds. The first weaver was in Nelson in the 1840s... Now I've got to think what his name was...[Blick]

But by the stage that New Zealand was being colonised, the Industrial Revolution was well on its way and it was manufactured stuff. So it just didn't pay. And there wasn't time...

L_____No, no it didn't last, and it didn't last in England either. It's interesting reading the weavers. Ethel Mairet that book down there, A Weaver's Life, I've just picked up. She started I think in the thirties [actually much earlier] and she was really scratching to learn how, and eventually a German weaver came over and Germany had kept the stuff going and helped the English with the hand-weaving

L It didn't get weaving going. It was spinning. Not weaving. The weavers had tried to start a Guild in the 1930s and I think they produced three or four newsletters New Zealand-wide. There were very few people who were actually weaving at that point. Very, very few. And then war took over and it was spinning and knitting and weaving didn't come along until after that. Later. Once the flush of the Post War...

L____And eighties.

L I think there were women like me who were happy to stay at home, didn't feel pushed out to work, didn't need to work because it was a living wage that your husband produced. You see it's not the case now. And that's really what changed things enormously. And I think it was a creative thing, it was just a general boom then. People wanting to do things with their hands, and it was a bit different, and these things do go in cycles.

With spinning it was a community thing, you got together with the spinning groups and that was away from home. And I think weaving was a lone thing, it was rather different.

L____Yes! Absolutely. Auckland Guild... I have a feeling had a three or four hundred membership – again you'd have to check. It was huge! Well they're down to sixty-something now. And there was a paid Secretary who was there two mornings a week

A____And what was the age of the women who were involved at that period?

A Would most people have looms at their own homes?

A _____And what sort of weaving were you mostly doing?

A _____And was there any particular kind of weaving you preferred to do yourself?

And were materials – I know you mentioned wool from the carpet factory being easy to come by. Was linen and other...?

A I've actually got something to show you that you might be able to tell me something about. This is a jacket, and it's made by...

A _____It would've been Robyn Parker...

A And what intrigued me is that it's still got her label that says "Not For Sale".

A I found it, actually. A couple of weeks ago I went up to Auckland when I went to receive that New Weavers Award. I was walking down K Road and a woman was having a garage sale. And I saw it on the rack and as soon as I saw it I thought, "That's hand-woven." And then I opened it up and I saw that [label] and thought, "Help! Where's that come from?" It wasn't hers. I asked her if she knew anything about it.

A I wonder whether it's been in an exhibition?

A _____ What era do you think that would be?

A I don't know whether it's been actually worn all that much. Although when I got it, one of the hems was down.

A But interesting that no one has ever bothered to take the tag out if they have worn it

And it's got the Auckland Guild label

A No.

A Wonderful! Hey thank you for telling me about that! I was so intrigued when I saw it because I had seen that little linen book by her just a week or so earlier, I'd seen that book at the Guild so I recognised the name

Thank you for talking to me. [Phone rings] That's good timing!

at least. A good library, which is still a very good library, a real reference library. I was librarian at one stage, refusing to throw anything out, you know! Because it is such a good reference library and I think that the library at Nelson Polytech would've been dismantled but I don't know.

L Thirties, forties... And older. There were older women – fifties, sixties, probably. They'd had their kids and had time to do something they wanted to do.

L Oh yes. There would've been far more spinners than there were weavers. And there were people in the Guild who were earning a living by weaving. Look, the names aren't going to come to me! Not many, but there were a few. Again Auckland Museum has a collection of a German woman – long since dead – and her name's gone, isn't it dreadful! She was set up at the Auckland Art Gallery and she wove curtains for the Auckland Art Gallery and so that was making weaving a bit visible. Then she went off to England so she wasn't around the Guild when I was there. Auckland Museum has had a big exhibition of her work.

L At that stage you wove in carpet wool. Because it was cheap, you could go to the carpet factory... lots and lots of colours and you could do all sorts of things with carpet wool. And then you moved on gently into cottons. And then if you were... We were given in our class, we all were given the same colours of linen and we had to design our own little runner and then it was someone from within the Guild looked at these and commented on them. And that was a good class exercise. And that was my very first linen weaving. I learnt that when they said you ironed with a hot iron that with linen you don't because you scorch it! My very first piece! That was not good.

The Society, the Woolcraft Society, and the branches down below, the Guild, were good teaching places. They got people in to teach, from overseas, and that was very good. So there was rug-weaving going on... and people went into different areas really. And there were good fine wools available for fabric weaving. So mostly I think that people would have been doing fabric weaving, making jackets and what have you.

└ _ _ Over the years I haven't done a hell of a lot really – it's once every so often. But it's kept on going. When I was at the Craft Centre I suppose I was weaving scarves and weaving linen pieces. And the linen pieces moved slowly, but they did move. But the scarves certainly went. That's what you'll find here at the Guild now, at the Society shop. A lot of scarves in there because that's what people want.

Linen was very expensive. And the Society brought linen in from Sweden and you'd buy your linen through the Society. So that was the way I got it mostly, and then someone opened up in Picton with linen that she brought in – different weights of linen. And that shop had sort of traversed all round the place and ended up with Agnes Hauptl way up north.

L Joyce! She wrote the little book on linen. Someone was asking me...

L She didn't email me but emailed my friend in Auckland who emailed me. So I replied to Jill who sent it on. I hadn't realised that Joyce was the linen lady and when I was working out what I would do for the Nelson Polytech final working with linen, she said, "Oh, you can use singles, they're fine!" She gave me confidence to do it. She lived around the corner from me in Remuera so, yes, I certainly knew Joyce.

And this will be... she's got a mixture... The heavy one is probably carpet wool and the fine yarn in there, that's nice I think you call it 2/16s which machine knitters used. And that was certainly available. I'm really intrigued!

L How did Robyn get hold of it?

L Because Joyce must've died a long time ago... I wove more tea towels with linen she passed on to me. She had a fine linen warp and I thought, "I've got to use this" and again it was a project for a design course I took part in probably back in the late nineties. I sent Joyce one of those tea towels but didn't ever get a response... but by that stage she was living on the Shore. But Upland Road was just around the corner from where we lived in Auckland. So I used to see her at the local shops.

L It would've been with that 'Not For Sale' on. And I wouldn't know... You see the Auckland Guild had exhibitions in the Museum. They were really big things, you know. And stuff sold. There was a big one in '87 during that Nelson Polytech course. It must've been the beginning of the year. And I had a tablet weaving thing that I was intending to use for the course and I dreamt that it had been sold and it jolly well had been and I had to do another one!

This is very typical. But that's not. Putting that [collar] in is quite intriguing. She's used different yarns for her weft. She's got a heavier weft there and a finer one there. Presumably for strength. It's well sewn in too, isn't it? She's done a nice job on that. That is interesting, isn't it.

L I would've thought seventies. Or early eighties. Because by the time that I started going to the Auckland Guild... about '82, '81 and she really wasn't all that active at that stage. So I would say seventies

_____It could have been... but possibly not by her.

Yeah, that's intriguing, isn't it?

L_____ If you went back through the Auckland Guild catalogues, you'd find it, I think. There is an archive... it was in a bag... I hope they've kept their catalogues, they should've kept their [exhibition] catalogues... No, they won't have photos but they would have Joyce Luke and what it was.

What's this? Was this the tag they put on when you got it?

L_____It's just a bit of cotton... it's just an extra...