

# ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

## TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH LOMA THOMPSON

**Date: 16th April, 2013      Interviewer: Ross Gwyther**

*[This transcript has been slightly modified by the interviewee to add explanatory notes when necessary. These notes or words are in "italics"]*

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LOMA: I was born in 1922 in Lismore in Victoria. My grandmother had a maternity hospital. Actually when Dad came back from the War we went onto a farm and, of course, prices were very high and things were getting very tough, and whilst we were there for awhile, we didn't last more than a few years because he couldn't afford to pay the rates and the mortgage. So we had to leave the farm, and he had to go and get whatever work he could. He finished up at the PMG in the main, after having done a whole lot of itinerant work in the meantime [*during those depression years*].

By that time, there were four kids, so we were living in Camperdown in Victoria. I had two sisters and a brother. Mum had been a teacher, and was a graduate from Melbourne Uni, but she had to go back to teaching to keep the food on the table. Living there in Camperdown, we had a pretty good childhood. We had a rented house with a large orchard out the back and we were just at the foot of Mt Leura in Victoria, so plenty of room to run and play and we went to the State Schools there, and that was pretty good.

Eventually, by the time it came to going to High School, we'd moved down to Colac, because Dad had been transferred there with the PMG. So I spent my High School years in Colac, and then I went to work, because I only went as far as Junior, and I'd had to leave and get a job.

I worked with a local solicitor, where I stayed for five and a half years, got a pretty good grounding in the Law and actually, it looked like I might have been able to do Articles, but I would have had to matriculate first, so I started doing subjects through a company called George Taylor & Staff Pty Limited, which used to groom people to try to get them to Matric standard.

So I was trying to do that [*while*] I was working at the solicitors, doing all the shorthand/typing and books. Then the War came, of course, and my boss enlisted in the Air Force and I didn't like the fellow who came to take over after him, so I decided, 'Well, I've had enough of this.' I had mates who were trying to persuade me to join the Air Force and go and drive trucks, but instead I decided to train as a nurse, so I went to the Geelong Hospital.

I trained there for three or four years. I went to the Queen Vic in the middle of that and did a Midwifery Course as well. After I'd come back from the Queen Vic, I was doing my staff year at the Geelong Hospital. It was just at the end after graduation, and you're not fully in charge but you learn the ropes, how to manage a ward and all that sort of thing.

So Dad of course had been through the War. He was a stretcher-bearer in France. Mum was a missionary in Fiji. She was over teaching Fijian kids, while he was in France, and they got engaged and he sent the ring over to her through the post and she had to get somebody else to put it on her finger.

Eventually they both came back to Australia and they got married. As I say, they went onto this farm which was probably, thinking about it now, a dead loss. They had pigs and cattle and a few crops, but it was all hard going [*against a Melbourne mortgager*].

So Dad was always thundering on about the capitalist [*system*] and, you know, who was running the country and I think he had a little bit to do with a Labor politician when they moved in to Camperdown, so he started – I mean, he'd come from [*Cobden*], they were all country hicks from good Methodist background, narrow minded, but the War wakes people up a lot. [*People were looking for different solutions*].

So he got a good political education and became very politically conscious during [*and after*] the War. When he came back I think he'd shed most of his religious convictions, and he was being goaded along by a fiery young Scotsman who'd come to live in that area, who had probably left Scotland to get out of being in the Army, but he would have been a very early Marxist. There was a small group of people around Colac who used to discuss books, the Left Book Club, and while there was no Communist Party there in the country town, they had good political discussions.

Politics have always been discussed from a Left point of view over our kitchen table. So that's the early grounding.

ROSS: So that was the sort of political influence on you when you were young?

LOMA: Yes.

ROSS: Okay. So you met Fred when you were still in nursing training?

LOMA: I'd finished. By that time the Dean of Canterbury had been over here. We'd been reading the *Socialist Six of the World* that Dad had been talking about, and talking about Russia, because Russia was our great ally at that time. It was the hope of the World, so we thought, "well, this was something to adhere to". [*in other words socialism we saw as an alternative*].

ROSS: So how did you meet Fred?

LOMA: At a Party Meeting. Well, we went to a cottage lecture first, and there were these introductory evenings where people would talk about particular issues, whatever the issues were at the time, and discussing books. I think we were talking about the British still being in India. There was a book that came out called *Quit India* at that time, written by somebody called Palme Dutt. I think that's probably what we were discussing.

So there always those sorts of discussions going on, all the stuff that came out in the Left Book Club. Fred had grown up in a similar background, because his father died when he was 10, and he'd had to be a paper boy and a baker's boy and do all those things before he went to school, so he'd had it fairly tough when he was little – but, you know, survived and got his apprenticeship, did his training, and the further he went, the more he learnt about the capitalist system.

ROSS: So had you both joined the Communist Party by the time you met each other?

LOMA: Oh, well, he had. He started off the League of Young Democrats in Melbourne, and somebody has written a thesis on that, too. He had always been very active. At a very early age he was on the Melbourne Committee of the Amalgamated Engineers Union, and he'd always been involved with the union all his life.

So he was very politically conscious, and *by the time* I met him, I had been to a couple of his cottage lectures. Another nurse and I went along and they said, ‘Oh, you know, why don’t you join the Communist Party?’ ‘Oh, okay, that’s all right’ – not thinking very much about it.

ROSS: So how did you come to go to the cottage lectures?

LOMA: There was a patient [*in my ward*] who talked the right way. I think I probably used to deliver his *Guardian* or something like that to him.

ROSS: And he would have told you----

LOMA: He told us about, maybe he worked at Fords or something like that, but it was a general industrial discussion. So he told me about these lectures that they were having, so we went along and listened.

Then I went to a meeting and, as I said, Fred had just been demobbed and he was working at Fords. The Party thought it was a good idea if he went to Fords and tried to sort out some of the union problems down there, which he did. So he just moved to Geelong, and that’s where I met him.

ROSS: When you say, just to follow that up, when you say the Party thought it would be good for him to work at Fords, was there quite a lot of the party organising where its members would go and work?

LOMA: I suppose there could have been. I’m not too sure about that, but wherever there was a lot of industry, wherever there were problems and wherever the workers needed someone to stand up for them against the boss, I think that’s where they would direct their cadres to go to, and this is what he was doing. So he went to Fords.

ROSS: So how long were you there?

LOMA: Well, when I left I went back to Melbourne, and I did a bit of private nursing for awhile. Then I decided I was going to - well - I’d always wanted to travel. Another nurse and I had worked it out that we were going to travel the World together, and we were going to go to New Zealand first, each of the four capitals. If you worked there for six months then you’d earn your fare back. Then by that time we’d head off to Europe, but unfortunately [*my friend*] got TB and died.

So I was on my own, and I thought, ‘Well, I can’t just sit here in Melbourne doing private nursing or doing district nursing.’ I thought, ‘I’ve got to go out and do something interesting,’ and of course Fred was by that time getting a bit keen and wanting to get married, and I said, ‘No, I’ve got to go somewhere first.’

So I just wasn’t sure [*where to start*]. So I came to Queensland. He said, ‘Look, here’s the map. Stick a pin in a couple of places. Apply to a few places, and whichever comes up, you can go to that and try that and see how you like it.’ Of course, he’d been up here, he’d been up to New Britain, he’d been up to the Islands, done the whole tropical bit.

So I came to Innisfail and I worked there. I got a telegram from the Matron saying, “Come at once,” because they were always short of nurses. After the War, people were going all over the place. So I went up there and I was in charge of the Midwifery, well, second in the Midwifery Department there for about ten months while I stayed there. Then I came down to Townsville and I worked down here for another nine months or so, thinking I was going to hop off and go to the Islands or somewhere

like that, but by that time Fred was getting a bit tetchy and saying, you know, 'If we're ever going to get married, let's do something about it.'

So he came up here near Christmas and said, 'Righto, we're going to do something about this,' so he bought me a ring and we got engaged. Then four months later I went back to Melbourne. In the meantime, after he'd left Fords, he'd been appointed as an organiser [*for the union*] to work around Tasmania. There were a lot of industrial problems in Tasmania, so I don't know what he was doing, but I know he was very cold. He was talking about riding a motorbike through the snow, but it wasn't in Bendigo, it was somewhere in Tasmania. I'm a bit hazy about those details.

So we came back to Melbourne, and he was seconded [*by the Peace Council*] to drive the Red Dean (*Rev. Hewlett Johnson*) around when he came to visit Australia that time [*for a conference*], so we had a very interesting few weeks while he was here and the press were chasing him around all the time and putting words into his mouth and making him sound like, you know, somebody who should be deported and got rid of pretty smartly.

You mentioned in your little sheet about work that you did on the job. Well, nursing was a very conservative profession, and so of course there was not very much political activity. I did get, because I opened my mouth, of course, I got *to be* President of the Student Nurses Association, had to organise dances and things like that. Then there was another group called the Hospital Employees Federation, which had – I had come in contact with it through a few Lefties in Melbourne, Flo Russell and others, and they wanted us to [*set up a branch*]– and I tried to recruit a few girls for that, but they were saying, 'Oh, no, oh, no, nursing's not a trade union; it's a profession.' So you know, you've got to overcome all sorts of stupid hurdles like that.

We were all working with our hands, all on rotten low pay, all working 50 hours a week, but anyway, them's the breaks - [*that was the norm then*].

I never went into a factory, never sort of met up with the masses or anything like that. The hard conditions were just what everybody else was suffering at the same time, so you just put up with it and got on with it, and made the best of the job, made lots of friends along the way.

While I was up here, while I was working in theatre here in Townsville [*Hospital*], there was one of those mad pineapple farmers on the Island who used to get on the rum, and he fell off his tractor one time and got really messed up and very badly injured. I was talking to him either coming into theatre or going out of it – probably coming out – and he was telling us about his pineapple farm over there, and I was saying how much I loved Magnetic Island, and he said, 'Oh, my mother's got a guest house out there. You should come over there sometime on your days off,' and so on.

Anyway, the penny dropped after a while and I thought, well, it would be nice to do that, but Fred said he was coming up for a holiday at Christmas, so we booked a couple of cabins over there and we went over there for a [*fortnight*] holiday. While we were there *we met* Bill, the pineapple farmer who had wanted to go into opposition with Hayles, who were the only people who transported the pineapples from the Island to the mainland. He had a boat which was badly disabled, and when Fred came up for the holiday that time he said, 'Well, you know, you're a fitter and turner. You're an engineer. You can fix this boat for me. Let's do it and we can get into competition with Hayles and really get this boat going.' But it was beyond Fred's abilities to do it with all the work that had to be done on it. So----

ROSS: So they used to grow quite a lot of pineapples on the island?

LOMA: Yes. As you go over the hill, when you get to Magnetic Island, you go through Picnic Bay, Geoffrey Bay, Alma Bay, then go up over the hill to Horseshoe Bay, and Horseshoe Bay is the pineapple growing area. As you get over the top of the hill, there's a sort of plateau there that they call Curlew Flats, where all the curlews are at night.

As you start going down the hill, all the pineapple farmers were over on the left hand side, a few on the right, and Bill had the whole of the right hand side, which was covered with pineapples, so he was quite a big pineapple grower. He had native labour. He used to get the boys from Palm Island, natives from Palm Island, to come over and do his chipping and [*packing*] and all that sort of thing for him, so that was sort of in '49.

We got married in 1950, so we went to live, so when we had this little galvanised hut, that was more or less a typical beach shack, you know, all made of galvanised iron roof and push-out windows with sticks and so on. Anyway, that was our first home at Horseshoe Bay. We went to live at Horseshoe Bay while Fred was working on this yacht, on this pineapple boat for Bill Swenson.

Well, you know, we got pretty sick of the island, you know, because for anybody who had been politically active, it was really pretty boring, you know, nothing much, an idyllic existence for awhile, but there was nothing much for me to do except lie on the beach and read books and sew up anybody who got into trouble with the coral or whatever else, you know. [*The highlight of the month was the Progress Association meeting!*].

So we came back to the mainland. *Fred* went to work in the Railways. He could get a job as a fitter and turner in the Railways, which is what he did, so he worked there for awhile, and of course he's always been an active unionist, and they had an Amalgamated Engineering Union organiser there who was a dead loss. Every time there was a problem he'd go and sort it out in the boss's office, so there was nothing very much happening.

Once they found that there was a fellow hanging around who was prepared to do something, and had a bit of nous and a bit of get-up-and-go, they nominated him, and so he won the election to become the organiser, and this fellow Willet had been *a dead loss* - if Mt Isa had a problem, he'd get on a train and to go Cairns. That's about the limit of his devotion to the workers. It was just a job.

So of course, Fred with all his *industrial* background, or all his union experience, and of course all his political theory, political economy and dialectic materialism, all the stuff that he'd read, it's all there in the background. It's all part of the person that he was, which enabled him to go forth and stir up trouble - *and properly represent the workers*.

I tried a couple of jobs. I worked for the Legion of Ex-Servicemen for awhile. That was a wishy-washy sort of job, and I didn't go back to nursing. I had a couple of office jobs, because once he got the job as organiser he had this huge Division which took from Thursday Island down to Rockhampton and out West to Alice Springs and Mt Isa - the lot.

ROSS: So he travelled a lot of the time?

LOMA: Travelled a lot, travelled a great deal. He had *to cover a huge area*, you know, you could fit the whole of the British Isles inside his electorate, which he used to show the organisers from England just what the size of the Division was that he had to cover. So it was all very interesting and stimulating for him, because all the mines and developments were just starting to open up.

There were the problems in the sugar industry and the mines were opening up in places like Weipa and Gove and Groote Eylandt, Mary Kathleen, places like that, so he had covered a huge amount of territory.

*Meanwhile* I was at home here, and I had Jan, my one daughter, at the time.

ROSS: Had you joined the Party by then?

LOMA: Well, I joined it when I was in Geelong that time.

ROSS: So what was your sort of involvement in the Party then?

LOMA: We transferred our membership up here, didn't do very much, used to go to the meetings and District Committees. Again, you see, I wasn't involved, I wasn't in a workplace where I needed to do any agitating or stirring of any kind, organising. [*I helped with election campaigns*]

ROSS: Well, one of the things would have been your involvement in the UAW?

LOMA: It came about because there's this publication here which I've just been re-reading about the role of the Communist women in the post-War period. I don't know whether you've seen that at all, but it talks about the development of the UAW, which *followed* from the old Housewives League, which was just a conservative women's organisation, but they [*the Party*] decided that they needed to have a bit more politics in it, so the Union of Australian Women was set up.

I was one of the founding members of that, so we got together. They'd started it in Brisbane, so we started a Branch up here, and of course Francis Bishop, she was the wife of the local party organiser here, and half a dozen others who really got going. My sister, who'd come up from Melbourne, when she was up here, she'd been very much involved with the Peace Movement in Melbourne. A visit of various Japanese notables who'd been very much anti-war .

ROSS: So the first sort of activity you did in the UAW when you established it was around the Peace Movement?

LOMA: Yes, always round the Peace Movement, because Menzies was still talking at that stage about war in three years. See, all the sabre-rattling was going on all the time.

But once that got started, then we had to have people who had a bit of spare time and a bit of energy, who were prepared to do anything about it, so while we used to say it was – actually, it was a gathering mostly of the wives of trade unionists and militant trade unionists, but it wasn't only confined to them. It was anybody else who was showing an interest and who wanted to align themselves up with any of the things that we were involved with.

There was the problem, well, we struggled for equal pay. The Ban-the-Bomb, the tests, the French tests that were in the Pacific. But it became known as an organisation of the Left, and so of course you struck all the usual obstacles where if you were trying to get a permit to run a street stall, you had to go to the Police to get a permit for a cake-stall and that sort of thing, and they did everything they could to put obstacles in your way.

ROSS: So what sort of things would you do? What sort of activities would you have done?

LOMA: We had this Women's Journal ["*Our Women*"] and we used to walk round town and we used to sell that all over Townsville, not letter-boxing, but just walking round the blocks of various suburbs and trying to put forward all the policy things that we were involved in.

ROSS: So you'd actually go to people's houses and talk to them about it?

LOMA: Yes, go and knock on the door [*mostly of Housing Commission houses*], all the houses of Wulguru, we used to do Garbutt, we'd do over here in Gulliver, the particular place, wherever there was a reasonably working class area. You'd go and talk to the women and try to find what their concerns were, whether it was the awful gas we were getting at one period of time. Like, we'd go and have deputations to the Manager of the Gas Company, who would say, 'Well, the reason your gas is no good is because the men in Collinsville, when the coal comes off on the conveyor belts, they throw big lumps of coal on it so that it won't mince up properly,' you know. Oh, there were all sorts of stupid excuses.

So we had campaigns like they'd try and make you open up your shopping bag at the *supermarket* checkout, and we objected to that. We said that was an infringement of privacy, and they'd say, 'Well, if you don't open your bag, we'll call the Police,' you know. We had all sorts of little demonstrations, but we were---

ROSS: What sort of response would you get from the people that you would meet there?

LOMA: Well, they'd call the Manager and he'd say, 'Oh, well, we'll call the Police,' but then eventually, you know, they wouldn't do anything about it. They'd say, 'Oh, well, go on, off you go.'

ROSS: When you went round door-knocking to find out issues from people, what sort of response did you get from them there?

LOMA: I think a lot of people were very polite and they were interested, and if you have a look at any of those magazines, they've got a lot of issues that concern women. I mean, they had the usual ones - *eg price control* - I haven't looked at one of those for awhile, but there'd be the usual recipes and stuff.

ROSS: So it's a pretty wide cross-section of things you'd have in it?

LOMA: Oh, yes, all about the basic wage. Everybody was trying to manage on a budget, and then the women in the workforce, problems that they were having. Then there was the question of the French Tests in the Maranoa.

ROSS: And how many people would you have had involved in it? How many women would have been active in the UAW here in Townsville?

LOMA: I think we would have about maybe ten active women, but we used to have a lot of morning-teas and we used to get speakers to come along and talk to them about current issues. We used to get the men from the trade unions coming along talking to them about their day to day issues.

ROSS: And would you advertise those more widely, those meeting?

LOMA: We would roneo invitations and send them out through the mail, and there was a lot of word-of-mouth, too.

ROSS: And how would your involvement in the party have influenced what you did in the UAW at the time?

LOMA: Well, it was the fact that you just kept going, no matter how many knock-backs you got.

ROSS: So you got some support from being members of the Party, because I guess what I'm looking at is, when you look at that period, you had a huge influence in terms of, you know, the Left had much more significant influence than it has today.

LOMA: They certainly did. Because it had been widely respected in the North for so long, with the cane-cutters' disputes and so on. There was a lot of respect for the Left like up round Innisfail and those places where they'd had the various strikes, in the people living around here, so no doubt there was, by the thinking members of the working class, I would say they [*the Party*] would have had a lot of respect. Even though they would respect what you did, they didn't necessarily want to join in and be involved.

We started off some other Trade Union Women's Committees, too, once we had the UAW going. We set up a committee for the Amalgamated Engineering Union – this was Fred's union. We used to have a very big Christmas tree, so I got a Women's Committee going there, so we had about ten women on that, and they used to work towards that.

Wives of the militant trade unionists, and they would bake cakes for us and, you know, we would raise money for that every year, so it was getting them active and giving them something, and giving them a little bit more knowledge than they would have had if they'd just stayed in the kitchen and just listened to their radio serials and so on.

We had one from – the AEU Women's Committee was the best one, and then we had one for the Waterside Workers, a small group of women there.

ROSS: Would you have had discussions at those meetings about politics and so on, too?

LOMA: Only in a general sort of way, never to a stage where, you know, 'Up the Revolution,' and you know, 'We've got to change the system.' You'd never get them to that stage. I mean, timid enough to get along to things that might be regarded as, you know, way out.

So it's always been a battle. I always found it [*difficult*] to get the women to become too involved, but we had this thing for International Women's Day. We used to run this every year, International Women's day – you know all about that, its foundations and so on – so we used to work fairly closely with Brisbane and we had speakers coming up from there, but we would have a good function every year and then join in other women who had heard of us but didn't particular want to join.

It was always a difficult time to get speakers. For instance, I tried to get a speaker once – she was the Principal of the Infants School here in Townsville. I told her about one particular function we were having that I wanted her to come along and speak, and she said, oh, she'd be delighted to.

Then she rang me back the same day to say she was very sorry, but she found she had another appointment that day, and that was the end of that. So they'd check up on you all the time. You know, you're aware of this. You're aware of surveillance, and I mean, with people like Fred who've lived with it all their lives, it's just part of living.

I mean, a couple of times I've been out speaking – we used to have Speakers' Meetings, we had a District Committee of the Communist Party, and whenever there was a campaign on and somebody

was being elected, for the Senate or the House of Reps, there'd be little street corner meetings that you'd go to, and hope that somebody would listen. You'd go to somebody's street corner and have a loud-speaker and do a meeting, and that would be, you know, a five minute meeting. Nobody much would turn up, but you'd hope that somebody would have heard what you had to say.

This would be straight down the line politics, you know, criticising the Government and the particular issue of the day, whatever it was.

ROSS: And you used to do some of the speaking at those, did you?

LOMA: Yes, I did a couple of those, a few of those. Every time we went around with [*the UAW*] magazine we'd have some sort of a petition. If it wasn't a peace petition like "Ban the Bomb," or against the French Tests or for equal pay, or for something else – some people would sign and others would say, 'Oh, no, my husband's in the Air Force. I've been told I'm never to sign anything.' So they might have agreed with it, but they wouldn't sign things.

And I mean, the peace petition, I'd go around knocking on houses in Hermit Park with a peace petition, and the women would sort of look at you and say, 'Oh, no, we don't want peace that way, thank you' – that sort of thing. It could be pretty down-putting, but anyway, *that's how it was*. If they don't want to stand and argue, that's it; whereas of course it was on all the time with Fred. He was out on the job. He was doing enough arguing for both of us.

ROSS: What about the sort of actual involvement in the Communist Party? Like, would you have had Branch Meetings?

LOMA: Yes, we had Branch Meetings regularly. Gloria Phelan was here in Townsville at the time. Gloria was a candidate for the Senate. She was living in Townsville when I first came here. She was a magnificent activist, you know, she used to ride her bicycle round the town, trying to get donations for things like the Patterson playground *named* after Fred Patterson who had been the *Communist Party* Member for Bowen. He'd always been getting on well with the local Mayor, and the Mayor agreed that it would be a good thing to have a playground for children in the middle of town, so Gloria went around and got a lot of donations for that.

The fact was that she got a lot of people on side, but then they had a library and Gloria had bought a whole lot of books for the library, but other women went round saying that she'd bought a whole lot of "red" literature, that the children were reading all this "red" stuff, and had probably never ever been in the library, but somebody must have seen something they didn't like and told about it. The same when they started to start up a choir. They had a, the man who was conducting the choir who had a few Leftist sympathies, so some of the [*conservative*] women got together, a lot of biddies, and they got the support of the Methodist Minister, and they took all those kids and had their choir somewhere else. It was really petty, parish pump stuff.

ROSS: Some of that would have been organised through the groupers and the NCC?

LOMA: Undoubtedly. I mean, they've only got to look at Fred's election *campaigns in the AEU union*. Every time Fred had an election, the Rules of the Commonwealth Council said that you're not allowed to have any printed material, it always had to be hand-written.

Well, today when I was looking for the stuff for you, I found a whole lot of Fred's records, including a number of hand-written tickets that had been written by members. He just kept them as a souvenir from all these willing workers who'd written, you know, who to vote for in the Commonwealth

Council elections, or for him, who not to vote for, because the groupers were pretty well organised, well, reasonably well organised, and they used to try and----

ROSS: So you'd all sit round a table and---

LOMA: And write, write, either in support of Fred or whoever the candidates were.

ROSS: What about the sort of philosophy that you took out of being in the Communist Party?

LOMA: Well, of course, it sticks with you. You see, once you've done the dialectical and historical materialism, [*and political economy*], you realise the role of the press as Public Enemy, and that it is there to serve the interests of the capitalist class. You become completely cynical and you know it for what it is. You know what they're up to. You can see through things straight away, whereas a lot of people can't. They believe what's in black and white [*in the paper*].

Well, look at what's happening with the election at the moment. Everybody believes the Murdoch and the Packer press. So I wasn't under any illusions about who was responsible for what's going on, and the role of politicians when they did the wrong thing. The role of the capitalist society, you know, the theory of surplus value. You know, in the first two hours of the day a worker earns his pay, and all the rest is just cop for the employer, to be exploited. The exploitation of the working class.

ROSS: What about the sort of philosophy of working with people in the community? What did you take out of being in the party, in terms of your sort of interaction with people in the community?

LOMA: It's the same sort of thing. All you can do is accept from them the things that are positive, and just ignore the negative ones, just to work with people the best way you can. I mean, I was in the National Council of Women and Neighbourhood Watch, and the Community Music Centre – a whole lot of things. We've been involved in a whole lot of things, but----

ROSS: Was some of that involvement because you saw the need to get active as a Communist in community activities, or was it more that you were interested in those things, anyway?

LOMA: Well, I would have been. I would have been interested in them, but you have to do something. If you haven't got a lot of revolutionary activity going on around you, you have to fill in your time doing something useful, and the best way, the least harmful things in the community, I would say. The UAW was allied to the Women's International Democratic Federation and we used to have long letters from them, almost typed on almost rice-paper.

They would be telling us in campaigns that they were involved in in Africa and India and every other country, and I used to try to bring this to the attention of the women at our UAW Meetings, saying, 'This is what's happening in these countries,' you know. They'd get bored. They just didn't want to hear about it after awhile. 'That's over there, but we're here, you know. Let's just talk about something else.' So they're politically backward, a lot of people, and you can't blame them for that.

These were the things that we did. We were just involved in these things all the time. Madam *Francis Katz* coming out here for the French Tests. She'd been in the Underground in France during the War, and when the local *Bulletin* [*interviewed her*], all they wanted to talk about was her role in the Underground. They weren't interested in the fact that she had come out here to *protest* against her country having the French Tests at Montebello. We were getting radioactive rain here in Townsville, out at Kirradella, out at Cloncurry, at the time.

I rang up every – you know, the Weather Station, the City Council, everybody I could think of, talking about the radioactive rain which was falling in Cloncurry. "Oh, no, never mind, don't you worry about that, little woman, you'll be all right. We'll take care of that situation," or else, "It's just a lot of codswallop. It's not true." So we really had a fruit and vegetable scheme, we had a dance group for little kids. We were always having speakers who'd come up here, who'd been overseas, China or *the Soviet Union* or somewhere else, talking about their trips, what was happening.

But it's the integrity of people, too, who have been associated with the Communist Party and who adhere to its principles. You know, as far as Fred was concerned, they always said that he was the only true organiser and the only one you could really rely on. He used to have people from every other union around who would say, 'Well, look, we haven't got anybody else we can talk to. Can we talk to you about it?' And so he would be somebody that they could focus on, because they knew that if they spoke to him, he would analyse the problem and do what he could about, and if he couldn't do anything about it immediately, suggest something down the line. So not just wipe something off, or use some "pollie-speak" or the equivalent of "pollie-speak" to shut people up.

We worked very hard doing all these things [*while the kids were at school*]. I mean, I suppose the kids suffered a bit. I remember Peter saying to me once, after one International Women's Day was over, I said, 'Oh, what'll I do now?' and Peter said, 'You can be calm now, Mum.' So, you know, kids have a certain amount of reaction to all these things.

ROSS: How did your kids fare in terms of, you know, people at school and so on, knowing that their parents were very active Communists?

LOMA: I think Jan copped a bit of it at school, and of course, there were always Catholic kids. Catholic kids were always well primed to have a go.

*(End of Recording)*