

**Recorded: 17 March & 28 June 2021**

Interviewer: Jo Wilson

Abstractor: Jo Wilson

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*The time codes in this abstract summary have been recorded based on the original audio files. Please note that the times may differ for the online audio due to the original files being combined into one file. However, the order of content in this abstract below will match the online audio.*

**Subjects:**

**Knitting, Spinning, Yarn, Dyed wool, Renovation, Clyde, Earnsclough Road, Restoration**

**File 01- 17 March 2021**

- 1.50 Born & raised in Whakatane
- 2.25 Trained as SCHOOL DENTAL NURSE  
Worked as School Dental Nurse for 7years in MANGAKINO, MATAMATA & MORRINSVILLE
- 2.40 1970; married FARM ADVISORY OFFICER, JOHN KELLY.
- 2.47 1973 Eldest son, GLENN [KELLY], born in Waikato Hospital
- 3.22 In 1981, had a year in Christchurch, where husband was lecturing at LINCOLN UNIVERSITY.
- 3.32 1982 Returned to OAMARU
- 3.12 1983 moved to ALEXANDRA, along with coloured sheep & goats acquired from OAMARU.
- 4.45 Always KNITTED from age 5, knitted own FAIR-AISLE jersey when 11 years old, and then for the family – now 3 small boys.
- 5.10 Bought a 13 are block of land in BLACKMAN ROAD, introduced to irrigation & orchardists.
- 6.12 Work; didn't want to re-train as dental nurse and had variety of jobs. Worked at the
- 6.18 HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTRE, on EARNSCLEUGH ROAD for 10 weeks, on ENTOMOLOGY, viz a study of Thrips, under JILL MCLAREN.
- 6.55 Was also breeding black and coloured sheep. (First person to use AI – with Veterinarian help – to breed white MERINO rams into coloured ewes to increase the gene pool.)
- 7.50 1989 Took 5 raw fleeces, (15kg), to the 'WORLD CONGRESS ON COLOURED SHEEP' in EUGENE, OREGON, USA. Travelling Dunedin/Auckland/Hawaii/ Portland.

9.59 Won the WORLD CHAMPION TITLE in the Medium-Fine section, (19-20 micron.)

10.50 All 5 fleeces sold – with enough money to cover the HILTON HOTEL bill for the week.

Since then, Marnie found a mill to spin it, in a home-spun style and dyed it herself, experimenting with various plant-based sources, or commercial dyes.

In 1991, September, set up her company, 'MARNIE KELLY LTD', with the retail name of "TOUCHYARNS"

11.30 Sold mid-micron yarn, (sometimes mixed with mohair, possum fur etc,) through retail outlets both in NZ and overseas. She spent 9 months travelling around the country marketing the product to retail outlets, who would add value to the yarn by making it into garments. Also included designers such as KAREN WALKER. Aimed for a presence in all major cities in NZ and AUSTRALIA – AUCKLAND was the last!

12.26 Travelled to various trade shows. EG; For 7 years to the ALEXANDRA PALACE in LONDON, as well as AUSTRALIA. Met and sold yarn to people in FRANCE and later JAPAN. Also sold yarn to AMERICA and other countries.

14.30 Wool was bought locally and spun by various firms able to replicate the home-spun style.

15.50 Local sales were from a retail space in EARNSCLEUGH ROAD, separate from the house; sold coloured yarn, and some weaving. Dying at home using limited volumes.

It was something of a mini-farm and enhanced by building a dam to attract local birds and to make it easier to round up the HIGHLAND CATTLE.

16.15 Pre 2010, got retail shops in HOLLOWAY STREET, (changed from FACHE STREET), CLYDE, prompted by the start of the OTAGAO CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL.

16.50 In 2010, Saw the current building at 19 SUNDERLAND STREET, and purchased it even though the floor and window frames were rotten. This was due to the fact there were no foundations, (joists were laid on rocks only), to the house, and a veranda post was sitting on a 4"x2" piece of wood. Then a full RENOVATION, costing more than twice as much as the purchase price. The floors and skirting boards were all replaced. Luckily a church building in ALEXANDRA on CENTENNIAL AVE was being demolished and the skirting boards and door frames profile matched perfectly. (This is now the site for REAP in ALEXANDRA.)

19.00 After the completion of renovations, the original family of 13, (the HARVEY family), visited during a family reunion.

The house was built in the 1920's – relatively new compared to its neighbours, because it replaced the original FAMILY BENDIGO HOTEL, (1863) with their stables out the back, and beside it the BANDD OF NEW SOUTH WALES on the street front.

- 20.34 On Marnie's current house site, (7 MINERS LANE), there were archaeological items found from both the HOTEL and its STABLES. These items were recorded by the HISTORIC PLACES TRUST and kept for the CLYDE MUSEUM.
- 20.58 The hut in her back garden originally came from the CLYDE RAILWAY and was transferred from the neighbour's property, and now has been RESTORED, has an original wooden floor and 'anchored down'.
- 21.40 Current employment numbers; a cleaner for 21 years, 2 people working part-time in the shop, and more in the factory. The business is currently run by Marnie's son Glenn [KELLY] & daughter-in-law Kylie.
- 23.24 The yarn is spun in NAPIER, and dyed in ALEXANDRA, (with a plant which came from a retiring owner in NORTHLAND, (Ralph). He also taught Glenn [KELLY] the skill of PERCENTAGE DYING dying to improve consistency of colour.
- 24.32 TOUCH YARNS turns 30 years old in September 2021. It has provided holiday jobs for all 3 sons, and grandchildren. It has been kept entirely in New Zealand, (rather than SPINNING done in China), and that has paid off.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, people started KNITTING and demand was intense. The firm was given an exemption, so was able to send YARN to Australia, Japan and UK until supplies ran out.

Employees are used for many manual handling tasks, and ensuring DYE batches are named accurately, as each batch of DYED WOOL has its own shade.

- 25.55 Marnie has built 4 Houses in the Alexandra basin area.

1<sup>st</sup> on BLACKMAN ROAD

2<sup>nd</sup> on EARNSCLEUGH ROAD– with its own retail space.

3<sup>rd</sup> on LOOKOUT DRIVE, (a new subdivision, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> completed house there)

4<sup>th</sup> MINERS LANE

- 27.05 Also owned a property on KAMAKA CRESCENT, (on BRIDGE HILL) – and did a major RESTORATION of house and GARDEN.

Shop on SUNDERLAND STREET– was the biggest project, due to it being in the HERITAGE PRECINCT. The house area has increased slightly, and when replacing the roof tanks, they found the original cupboard doors, (from the hallway), and most the original hinges. The rest of the hinges were provided by JIM ROBBIE. Two huts which were tacked on the back of the house were used as a LAUNDRY and BATHROOM. Both were rotten and therefore removed and replaced by a working bathroom.

29.53 End of File 01

**File 2 – 28 June 2021**

- 1.45 Job at REAP, (Rural Education Activities Programme), Alexandra.  
1985, job advertised and worked with JEAN SIMMONDS. Worked with under-privileged children or those with learning or communication difficulties. 9 months later REAP was being reconstruction, with no job security for the future.
- 2.50 Offered to apply for job as an OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, (O.T.) ASSISTANT at DUNSATAN HOSPITAL, Clyde, under JAN PESSIONE. Worked there from 1987 to 1992. Worked with elderly inpatients and those in the community. ST JOHN provided free transport and used their Alexandra Rooms for GROUP THERAPY programme. Although supposedly a brief transition from Hospital to Community living, some were there for 10 years. RANUI REST HOME was open, but not CASTLEWOOD, so options were limited.
- 5.00 Offered training for an O.T. degree course, even though it would have meant 3 years in DUNEDIN. That would have meant a job with much paperwork and other changes so didn't take up offer.
- 6.00 1991, September, Set up TOUCHYARNS, under company name of 'MARNIE KELLY LTD'  
6.35 date 1982 Set up CRAFTERS CO-OPERATIVE in old mud-brick building in MANUHERIKIA ROAD, opposite the camp ground. A year later they moved to a building closer to town, opposite VALLENCE COTTAGE. The 15 members paid \$2000 for a new veranda.  
Marnie supplied weaving, spun wool, others were, ceramicists, painters, dried flower arrangers. It was very popular- lots of business from the Camp Ground people.
- 8.30 The CRAFTERS CO-OPERATIVE lasted 15 years, the longest lasting Co-op in New Zealand at the time.
- 11.01 Marnie left the CO-OPERATIVE to sell a greater variety of stuff, e.g. locally made knitting needles.
- 11.18 Was HAND-DYING YARN. Enjoyed mixing and blending colour. Method is an INDUSTRIAL SECRET. Now using PERCENTAGE DYING method as more reproducible.
- 12.30 Natural materials used for HAND DYING were LICHEN (used initially), but it required a large bulk and too slow growing for sustainability. Also used ELDERBERRY & MULBERRY, but not dye-fast and they fade. ROSE HIP not useful as the 'whiskery' bits get stuck in the wool fibres. FLAX flowers, roots & seed pods good. It grows fast, everywhere and was accessible. Used to have Secateurs and gumboots in car for getting plant materials.
- 14.10 WALNUT SHELLS AND HUSKS from the green walnuts are used to get a yellowish colour in wool.
- 14.38 Dye setting agent - uses GLACIAL ACETIC ACID, (aka white vinegar). Other poisonous ones available, but not used.
- 15.20 RESTORATION of TOUCHYARNS shop on SUNDERLAND STREET, CLYDE. There are folders containing A4-size PHOTOGRAPHS and an Archaeological report – but no digging was required on that site.

- 16.25 Digging of new house site, (7 MINERS LANE) is a heritage site, (used to be site of STABLES of the first family BENDIGO HOTEL, 1963, ie PRE-1900s, so has a substantial report completed by MATT SOLE, and both reports will reside in the re-vamped CLYDE MUSEUM in BLYTHE ST.
- 17.18 No record of the building of the house – so possibly moved there in the 1920s. Originally house sat on rocks (now in the front garden.) Now sitting on piles.
- 18.00 Roof and rafters removed and rebuilt.
- 18.22 MARKETING TOUCHYARNS. Make 7 trips to an International TRADE SHOW held in LONDON each year. At the ALEXANDRA PALACE – now restored building, but originally the BBC Studios.
- Had her own VAT number, (GST equivalent in UK), and had produce air-freighted to London for the show. Marnie was able to travel widely going to or from London.
- 20.44 At Trade Show was visited by a SHETLAND ISLANDER and although invited there, didn't visit. Did get to the Islands of HARRIS & LEWIS. Was on bus tour, persuaded the driver to stop at a small weaving croft. It was a family business, weaving in traditional style, in heather-based colours, using a very coarse wool grown locally. Wool spun in GLASGOW, woven on HARRIS. Weavers were un-married brother & sister but were hoping to recruit a relative to teach.
- 23.17 End of interview.

**File 03 – 28 June 2021**

- 0:00 Thanks, and sign-off.