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Oral History –
An Interview with
John Maclay



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Interviewee: John Maclay

Interviewer: Lesley Goldberg

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I was the second youngest, my younger sister she was at school. I was at school and I admit I left school a bit early. If I found a job before I left school, but my younger sister went on.

Q: The younger ones in the family in those days got the advantages in education, the older ones left a bit earlier?

Well nearly all of my family went on to the leaving certificate. I left school in the leaving certificate year and I worked for the Vacuum Oil Co for about eight months and my health started to play up and the doctors told me that - a specialist in Macquarie Street - I would never be able to work indoors, indoor work wasn't suitable I should be out in the open.

Q: Well let's go back to the family when you were a child. Would you say that the - it was a close family?

Very close knit family. There are only two of us left and the two of us keep in contact.

Q: So when you were all children, what sort of things did the family do together? Can you think of any particular outstanding occasion?

Oh yes, we used to play football in the back yard.

Q: Just the boys or the girls as well? There were four of each.

We played all sorts of games together, our father did too.

Q: Was it a fairly free childhood? Were you sort of allowed to roam a lot.

It was pretty open country at the time and we were allowed to roam.



Q: You told me the river was important in your life, obviously you spent time swimming.

I used to do a lot of swimming in the Parramatta River at Meadowbank Park. Meadowbank Park was a very popular area in those days. Back to 1928 -29 - 1930 they had a big dance pavilion and it was nothing to see two or three ferries at what was then known as the 2GB wharf, on a Sunday or a public holiday, and they used to play all sorts of games and dance.

Q: People would come off the ferries?

Picnic all day.

Q: So that area that's cleared was cleared quite early there?

Well the main part - the oldest part of the park was very hilly and down on the shores of the river was a flat area about I suppose about 50 or 60 feet wide, might be wider in places. This is on the Parramatta side of the railway bridge. In those days a lot of the boys who didn't have much sense and I might have been one of them, we used to climb out - go across the bridge and climb on to the pylons and dive in to the river.

Q: This is the railway bridge?

Yeah. Oh there was no traffic bridge then.

Q: You weren't worried about the sharks?

Not in the slightest. The sharks were there, it was a quick swim to shore and then climb back up to the bridge and -

Q: I've heard stories of the sharks even taking kid's dogs?

Oh yes some of our neighbours if they had pups or kittens they didn't want, we used to take them down to the river and drop em, and the sharks would get them, but in those days there was a lot of sharks in the river.

Q: But still it's interesting, you were dare devils?

Silly. Off our heads.

Q: You told me that you learnt to lifesave down there on the river.

Charity Creek's still there, I told you it's a concrete canal - channel now. And it goes up under where Constitution Road and Station Street meet, and the canal goes underneath, below where they meet. It goes up under the railway where the technical college is at the present time. In those days where the technical collect is there used to a large engineering manufacturing works called Meadowbank Manufacturing. They used to make bodies for cars and



they built railway trucks and railway carriers. General engineering and it went quiet in 1932 in the depression years.

Q: Who taught you life saving there?

There was a family called Archers, a family called Cunningham. There was a - we were all school mates together, one of them had qualified and would pass it on to us, it was elementary. A couple of years later I joined Freshwater Surf Club and I only had to qualify in the swim to be accepted.

Q: Can you remember how you learnt to swim?

Yes I was thrown in the water. I wasn't supposed to learn to swim?

Q: How old were you?

I suppose about 15.

Q: You were as old as that?

Yeah. Because of my health I wasn't supposed to do a lot of things. I wasn't supposed to play football and I wasn't supposed to play tennis and I wasn't supposed to play cricket. I started to play cricket when I was about 18 or 19 years of age.

Q: Tell me about that, because I mean that childhood illness is interesting isn't it? How old were you when you recall?

- I don't remember much before I was six years old, but from what my family tells me I had almost every common disease that kids used to get, they don't get these days, like measles and mumps. I even had pneumonia and I had a bad bout of diphtheria they tell me. And then - it would be 1915 I suppose I got rheumatic fever and I was nursed at home and I was in bed for I suppose 15 or 18 months.

Q: Do you remember much about the nursing? Who was the nurse?

My mother.

Q: Just herself?

My older sisters helped.

Q: And the doctor's instructions were you were to stay in bed?

Yeah. And the medicine was that when you took a bad case and you looked like you might pass on, they'd treat you brandy and hot water.



Q: And that happened did it?

That happened.

Q: Do you remember?

I don't remember, but they tell me it happened. One think I do remember. Our doctor who had to come from Eastwood, a fellow called Dr Guthrie Hunter, he was here one afternoon about half past 4 or 5 o'clock and he told my mother he doubted I would live beyond midnight. In the bedroom the old home had a fireplace in it, on the mantle was an old fretwork clock and I was supposed to have been unconscious I think when I heard this talk going on and I lay in bed watching the clock and at ten minutes after midnight I told my mother well, I'd made it. I can remember that, and as I got better - started to get better.

Q: After you had to leave the Vacuum Oil Company - you couldn't stay with them, you took a job as a trainee boot maker. That wasn't exactly outdoors?

It was an open sort of small workshop, big open windows in the front of it. In a garden area and I used to do a lot of the work in the open. We don't see them now, used to do a lot of hand sewing outside in the shade of a tree, or if it was a cold winter morning you'd sit in the sun doing it.

Q: And how did you get that job?

The guy that had the shop Alec Moran, he had a retail shoe business in Blaxland Road and shoe repairs and he had this special workshop up the back. He and my mother were the same religion and of course I was too old to be an apprentice and he says, 'Well I'll take him on as a trainee'.

Q: How well were you paid?

Oh, reasonably well.

Q: And if you learnt the whole trade?

No I didn't I learnt - I did about 3 and a half years and then the depression hit bad and the profitability of the business fell, people weren't buying footwear as much and they weren't getting them repaired as often and the result was that I had no job.

Q: You were put off?

Yeah.



Q: Were others put off at the time?

There was 3 of us worked there. The boss himself - a fellow called Fred Earl and myself.

Q: Did the business collapse?

No, the business was still going when I came home from the war.

Q: But he put off staff?

Yeah about 2 years, 3 years and then things started to pick up a little bit but by this time I was doing other work.

Q: And what was the next job?

I was working as a builders' labourer for my brother-in-law, he was a plasterer and I was mixing mud and carrying it to him. When I was a bit off colour I'd just sit down and have a rest. That was about for 4 months, he had a couple of big jobs on.

Q: So he was able to keep going during the depression?

Oh yes. And -

Q: - what sort of job - what were these big jobs, do you remember?

Private homes, big private homes, people had money, could still build homes in the depression years. And I worked with my brother-in-law for about 6 months and after that a builder at Roseville, building 2 houses opposite Taronga Park gates. 2 big homes there, and after that there might be a gap, you know, you might be doing nothing for 3 or 4 months. Then I worked with a fellow called Fred Dukes on a building at Eastwood.

Q: How did you get that job?

He advertised and I just went up.

Q: It must have been terribly competitive.

Oh yes, if you weren't early on the job you missed out.

Q: And did you get to the top of the queue?

Yeah. The jobs he advertised were only 10 minutes walk from where I lived at Denistone Station and he built 2 homes there.



Q: Did you turn up first?

I was there about half past 5 in the morning.

Q: Can you remember how many people showed up after you?

Could have been twenty. I worked for him for 6 months we had three jobs, two jobs just above Denistone Station and one up at Lakeside Rd Eastwood, and he recommended me to a plumber in Eastwood called Williams, worked for Williams for nearly eighteen months.

Q: And that was when the sewer came through?

That was when the sewer come through West Ryde.

Q: So people had money to get the sewer connected up.

They were given a certain time to get on the sewer or the nightman would - they'd fix a date when the nightman would finish. You know?

Q: Would this be still in the early 1930s?

Oh it would be '35, might be '36.

Q: What were you mainly doing? Digging ditches?

Digging ditches and laying pipes. Williams wanted me to go on. We had a discussion about it and he says, 'you could go on and take a ticket as a drainer, but I think you're too well educated and there's plenty of other fields where you could earn your money a lot easier than being a drainer.' I worked for him for eighteen months and then I got the sack because had done all the sewer in Eastwood and they were waiting for extra mains to be built and I just - Bill Williams said, 'Well I'll have to put you off', he says, 'But if these things are done in the next twelve months I might get in touch with you.' That would have been about 1938. Then I worked for a fellow part time called David Clarke in Eastwood, he had a big shoe retail store.

Q: How did you get that job?

Through a sister of mine who knew them. It was a part time job. I used to do window dressing and counter jumping. I didn't mind the job but I wasn't too keen on how business was done, you know. In those days things were a bit grim. A woman come in and wanted a pair of shoes, he'd show her a pair of shoes and they might be 12/6d or fifteen bob or something like that. 'Well yes that's what I'd like, but I'd like a better quality'. So he's show her 3 or 4 more pair of shoes and bring the fifteen bob ones back and put a price of \$25:00 on them and, 'that's exactly what I want'.



Q: Twenty five shillings?

Yeah, and she could have got them for fifteen.

Q: Do you think that was general practice or was it just his fiddle?

I think it was pretty general practice. Pretty general practice. After I'd finished, in one period in that period I worked as a grocery boy - I told you about it, with a fellow called MacIntyre?

Q: Where was his shop?

In West Ryde. The shop's still there but it's not a grocery shop it's a big chemist shop on the corner of Victoria Rd and West Parade. I was supposed to work for 6 weeks so the 2 sons that were in the business could have a bit of a break. They hadn't had one for 3 or 4 years. And while they were having a break - one of them Bob MacIntyre, who was an accountant, but couldn't get a job in his profession got a job with 'Goodyear' Rubber Co., over here at Randwick, so I worked with MacIntyre for about eighteen months - fifteen months - till he went broke, went bankrupt.

Q: What year was that?

Might have been '36.

Q: So things were still hard.

Oh times were hard right up to the war. Things were getting easier, but not real easy.

Q: What did a grocer's boy do?

I used to go round and take orders. I'd deliver them, a box of butter would come in and they'd be up on the counter and we had wires where (demonstrates with clicking noise) one would come out in pounds and one would come out in half pounds and you'd have to weigh em and make sure that they were true to weight. You used to balm bacon, the bacon used to come in big sizes and you'd balm it. ---- still do it I think, but all the bacon comes already cut and wrapped. Used to cut cheese. And used to serve behind the counter.

Q: And what about bagging the tea and sugar and stuff?

Sugar came in parcels but you weighed sugar. Tea come in packets, but you weighed sugar up. Sugar used to come in 56 pound bags. You'd weigh it up in 1 pound, 2 pound, 4 pound and 6 pound.



Q: How did you deliver, on a bicycle?

No, in a Morris van.

Q: So you got a driving licence at some time?

I didn't get my driver's licence - oh yes I had my driver's licence then but I drove a car - oh - 8 years before I got a licence.

Q: Nobody worried?

Nobody worried a great deal. My mother was going to New Zealand and I drove her down - my mother and sister were going to New Zealand to visit a sister of mine who lived in -

Q: Auckland was it?

No. The capital - Wellington. And I drove em down to the wharf at 10 o'clock one morning, saw them off, the last thing my mother said to me was, 'I'd feel a lot happier if you got a licence, especially when you're in the city'. I said, 'Oh I'll go and get one'. So I went up to Sussex Street to a police station in Sussex Street, down towards the bridge end. 'I want to get a licence.' 'Have you got a permit?' I says 'No, what's a permit?' 'Oh you have to have a permit before you can get a licence, have to learn to drive.' I said, 'Oh I know how to drive.' And the copper said, 'How did you get here?' I says, 'I drove here.' He said, 'Where's your car?' I said, 'Just outside the station.' He said, 'Well you have to have a permit first.' I had to pay 5 shillings for a permit, they made out a permit and I just walked outside into Sussex Street, came back and I got a licence.

Q: He didn't give you a driving test?

No, I got - he said, 'You can't get a licence, you haven't had the ---- for 3 months. I says, 'But I know how to drive.' He goes inside and comes out and says, 'Right.' We get in the car and he says, 'Go down the hill there, past the first cross street there's a fish and chip shop on the left, pull up outside of that.' And he went into the fish and chip shop and come out with an armful of fish and chips for the station (laughs). 'Take me back to the station.' (Whistles.) Swung round and pulled up in front of the station for him and he said, 'Yeah, you can drive. How long have you been driving?' I said, 'Oh about 8 or 9 years.' (Laughs) I come home with a licence. So there you are. And I enlisted in 1940. I got called up in July.

Q: What job did you have at the time you were called up?

I was working with this David Clarke man, part time.



Q: This was the boot repairer? How did you learn the window dressing skill?

I didn't, just come natural I think, I'd been amongst footwear for a few years and I did the best I could and I pleased him.

Q: You didn't get commission in those days, you just got your salary?

No we used to get paid - I think at that time, about 15 bob a day, but if you did this shonky business of selling people 15 shilling shoes for 25 or even 30 bob you had to share it with the boss. (Laughs) So you made a bit extra that way.

Q: And you worked part time you said, what were the part time hours?

I used to work Thursday afternoons, all day Friday and Saturday morning.

Q: Was that enough to keep you?

Well it was enough to give mum a pound a week, you could get board anywhere for 15 bob - a pound a week.

Q: Did she have widow's pension by this time?

Not that I know of.

Q: She didn't?

No. I think it was only during the depression years the widow's pension come in, I'm not sure.

Q: She would have been eligible wouldn't she?

Oh I think so.

Q: You told me that -

- in those days you could apply to the council for the dole, but I was the only member of our family who was actually out of work and I applied and do you know the answer I got? 'Your mother owns the home she's in, you've got a car in the garage', which we did have. 'When you get rid of the car, you can come and re-apply'. So I said you can go and jump in the lake. But the dole was only -

Q: - 3 days work a week wasn't it?

No, no, sometimes, if you were single you'd only get a day.



Q: This was Spooner's scheme in that period, the state government brought in? You told me that you became a member of the UAP. Were you acquainted with the leading political figures in the area?

I was acquainted with 3 local people, I knew David Anderson for quite a few years who was a member for Ryde. He got defeated in the depression by - I forget the local bloke's name. But he only lasted one parliament. And Fred Stewart defeated him.

Q: That was the federal election wasn't it? Stewart was a federal member?

Spooner was the state.

Q: Well Spooner was the state member for Ryde, is that right?

Yeah and Spooner was the federal.

Q: The federal member for Parramatta -

- Stewart was the federal member.

Q: What sort of a fellow was Spooner?

He was a very forceful man, possibly today they'd say he had great strength of character. He was a chartered accountant, he thought he knew all the answers and I think he was a member for Ryde for two sessions.

Q: How did he behave when you were with him when De Groot was elected?

He was all right, quite sociable. He had his rooms in Ryde RO. And he was - like for me - I was an unemployed sort of guy, he had just as much time for me as he had for the business men and the wealthy people of West Ryde, he was quite sociable, quite easy to get on with.

Q: Why did you join the UAP?

My people were - my father and all his brothers were staunch unionists and when the depression really hit and John Lang was in parliament and I thought - doing the right thing, and then they had a big split, he and the labour party they were - what was the guy's name that came out from London and told us how to run the country? [Sir Otto Niemeyer] Well Jack Lang didn't like what he said and the state bank of the day closed down and to my way of thinking the labour party did the wrong thing by Jack Lang and his part of the labour party and they crossed the floor on him and he had to get the country an election and they were swamped. That upset me I didn't like it at all so I joined the UAP.



Q: Right you were fed up with the Labour Party. What did it mean to be a member of the UAP at that time? Did you go to meetings?

I went to meetings, yes.

Q: Where were they held?

They were held in the electoral office in West Ryde and they were held in different private homes. The main private home was - a fella's big home up on top of Terry Road. Up on the Denistone, he had a big home there and his grounds ran through Blaxland Road and ran around the edge of the hill.

Q: Millhill?

No. I don't know the name of it, but it run into Perry Road right up on the top. Harry Blytheswood his name was. And from memory he was the chairman of the branch. I campaigned for both Spooner and for Stewart.

Q: And what does that mean when you say you campaigned?

We went around knocking on doors for em. I remember knocking on one door and the guy that lived there that knew our family well he said, 'Young Maclay,' he said, 'If your father knew what you're doing, he'd turn over in his grave.' - Because dad was staunch labour.

Q: Tell me about the public meetings?

The public meetings were mostly held on the back of trucks. Three or four, or five, or half a dozen chairs on a truck. They'd meet in places where - were made public, the best they could. And a couple of hundred people would turn up.

Q: They would advertise where they were?

Yeah, and sometimes they would hold a meeting in the old Ryde town hall, but mostly in the open air and mostly at seven or eight o'clock at night.

Q: Did they advertise them with posters?

In the local paper.

Q: Was there a lot of enthusiasm for these 2 politicians that you -

- there was at the time. The enthusiasm probably in the second election - the re-election - the enthusiasm would wane a bit.

Q: That was 1935?

Yeah. I don't remember the election in 1938. I don't think they took part in it.



Q: And between elections what sort of involvement did a party member have?

Very little. You'd go to a party meeting and they'd come up with bright suggestions and pass em on to the local member and if the party saw fit they'd ignore it and if they didn't - if they liked the idea they'd probably go ahead with it. Most of our meetings might last an hour and then turn into a social evening.

Q: If you had a political rally or speaking from the back of a truck was it always the member?

There was others too. Supports, good speakers.

Q: Was there much heckling at public meetings?

There was a big one when there were big changes in Ryde. There wasn't much heckling but at the second election there was a bit.

Q: 1935?

Yes.

Q: What sort of issues were popular or unpopular at the time?

Oh don't ask me now, that's (laughs) 60 years ago.

Q: I was thinking of the hospital issue actually because that was obviously a big issue in the early 30s.

I don't remember that. Ryde hospital was built - I think it was opened in 1929. I'm not sure.

Q: I think it was a bit later, didn't you tell me you worked with a group to raise money, do you remember any details of that fund raising?

Oh yes, I can remember a bit, we used to - most young people - a lot of names that I've forgotten now. We used to hold outings. Lake Parramatta was one of our favourite outings. We'd go over there on a hot night with crumpets and frankfurts, swimming costume and a towel. Saturday night was our big night out. Camp fire - sing songs around the camp fire eating crumpets and frankfurts and what have you.

Q: How did you raise funds out of this?

But we used to charge a bob or two bob for the right to attend and there'd be about 20. A lot of money you know. 20 people would come up with a shilling a head for the privilege of walking from West Ryde to Lake Parramatta. (Laughs).



Q: You didn't hire a bus, everybody had to get there by themselves?

Oh in those days people were used to it. We used to - few seniors used to meet of a Saturday night at a friend's place in Denistone, Jim Clark and Wen Clarke and we'd play cards and we used buy beer for, I think 11 shillings a dozen and at the card party we'd sell em for two bob. So you made one and a penny (laughs). There might be 20 or 30 people there, in the lounge room and the kitchen and the back verandah, playing different games of cards. That used to raise money. Our object was we tried to raise money to help furnish. We used to go to Roseville baths swimming. We'd take car loads.

Q: There were a few of you who had cars by the sound of things.

Oh yes, well my family had a car and they let me borrow it on these occasions. A few people had cars. We got banned from Roseville baths eventually.

Q: Why was that?

A stinking hot night we went over there and we passed a stall on the road selling watermelons. So we took the watermelons down with us and of course you know what happens to watermelons? When you got down to the skin you'd break it into pieces and we'd have watermelon fights. We made a terrific mess according to the manager of the baths and we weren't allowed to come back.

Q: Why did you go as far as Roseville when there were obviously baths on the Parramatta River that you could have gone?

Roseville was lit and it had a dance floor and it had facilities for watching the baths, like open tier seating.

Q: And they were more primitive along Parramatta River?

Parramatta River was just a fence around a section of the river, 110 yards long. And if it was low tide you couldn't swim in it.

Q: But there must have been opportunities for dances around the area?

Oh yes there was plenty of opportunities, but we liked to get away (laughs) more fun, a bit away from home. See West Ryde in those days, we only had one dance floor and you'd have to book it.

Q: Which one was that?

The Masonic Hall.



Q: You had to book it?

Yes you had to book six months ahead. We didn't know what we'd be doing six months ahead. (Laughs) More dance halls came in the early 30s. Leeds Hall which was upstairs, over a group of shops. That was a good one and a dance teacher, I've forgotten her name, she lived in Epping and they built a hall up in Victoria Road called Leeds Hall and we used to go up there and have a lesson in whatever the modern dance was of the day. The Charleston and the 'black bottom' and those sort of things.

Q: You did all of these?

I'd sit and look, occasionally I'd get up and try. They weren't a good thing for me, they were very vigorous dances the old Charleston and the 'black bottom'.

Break in Transcription

Q: Your health stood up under all this?

Well I'd say so. I was seven stone four when I walked on the boat.

Q: You didn't have to be carried on to the boat?

Walking fit they call it. I put on about 4 pounds coming down. We pulled into Sydney Harbour on the 9th October, '45.

Q: Was there anyone to meet you?

No, some people were on the wharf, some people come out on the harbour to meet the boats, but my family apparently were notified, but they couldn't meet us on the wharf. We come off the boat on to the double decker busses and were taken straight out to Glenfield and we stopped outside the camp, and we went in, a bus at a time. My family met me out there. My two sisters, Beth and Nell - might have been 3 sisters. Yeah, 3 sisters, they were in a taxi. And they pulled up at every bus, 'Have you got a John Maclay with you?' So I got off and met my 3 sisters and one of their little children and the taxi driver said, 'Would you like a beer?' Out in the boot of his car he had beer in an ice box. 'Get a few of your mates down.' So we stood outside the bus having a cold beer, we got 2 bottles of beer a day coming out on the boat. We were told we had to drink it for health purposes. Help us digest our food and what have you. When it was our busses' turn to go in. We disembarked and there was a parade ground there, big bitumen parade ground and army huts around there and a lone woman standing over the other side. And one of the boys said, 'There's nurse Mac.' I recognised her from a distance but she didn't recognise me. I had left Australia twelve and a half stone and I was drawn and haggard. You can image what we looked like, in a uniform that fitted you all over and touched you nowhere because they never had uniforms small



enough. I walked across the parade ground and met up and it was Jean, and she was - you know - a commissioned officer so I stopped in front of her and threw her a salute. (Laughs). She said, 'You don't have to do that with me.' And she had tears in her eyes. 'What have they done to you?' What they had done to me - you couldn't tell her on the parade ground. At any rate we - they paraded us on a smaller parade ground out the back. All the metropolitan people could go home immediately on the condition they report at 10 o'clock the following morning. 'We want to get all the country people on trains today.' They gave us clothing coupons, food coupons and cigarette coupons. We went up to the canteen to cash our cigarette and tobacco coupons and we got a double issue and they never took the coupons off us (laughs). We got in the cab and came home.

Q: Did Jean go home too?

No she had to stop behind.

Q: Was she stationed at Glenfield?

No she had to report back to the Women's Hospital. She come up that evening for dinner with us. The first thing we did, we pulled up at the butcher shop at West Ryde owned by a 14 - 18 digger by the name of Arlatt, and my sister walked in and said, 'Well he's home'. He says, 'Good' and goes to the cool room. He says, 'I've kept this for 6 weeks' and it was a full fillet of steak and we had fillet steak - the first time I had fillet steak in 4 years. I went over for a hair cut, I'd saved it to get a good one I reckoned. And Jack Balkan's shop had a sport store, tobacconist and he had three chairs working. He said, 'You're a bit long in the whiskers mate.' I said, 'Yair I've kept it especially to get a decent hair cut.' So he comes out - he didn't do any haircutting, he was a barber but he had polio and his one leg was in irons, and he gave the barber strict instructions what sort of hair cut I wanted and I didn't get it. And he rang the union up - you couldn't sack anybody because a replacement was hard to get you see. He rang the union up and told them what had occurred and they gave him permission to sack the fella. ---- ---- ---- before I'd paid for the hair cut he'd ---- ---- ----.

Q: You still paid for the hair cut?

Oh I paid for it, yair. I remember walking in there one day smoking English Capstan tobacco and they could smell it all over the shop. 'Who's smoking good tobacco?'

Q: Hard to get?

Very hard to get, and - I was - Jack said to me - he was a smoker, - when I pulled it out, he said, 'My god I haven't seen anything like that for five years'. A couple of tough blokes that went in for hair cuts that I knew. 'Can we have some smoke?' So I pulled out some native tobacco that I'd brought home with me and gave it to em. And it looked like good, fine cut tobacco, but it tasted more like

**[Tape break]**

- yeah well a lot of the boys used to wash it and the juice would come out of it and we'd soak dried paw-paw leaves in it. But it was still strong tobacco. We used to sit down - when you first smoked it - well you'd be likely to pass out, especially if you didn't full draw back on it. I gave them this to smoke. I've never heard so much coughing and (laughs) and spluttering in all my life.

Q: So in a sense it was the holiday you needed to recuperate?

I didn't recuperate, I was still crook. I had - I used to call it morning sickness. When I come home from the war, I was home a couple of months and about 10 o'clock every morning I used to have a great vomiting attack and I wasn't putting on much weight. I went to the local army doctor and he said I was suffering from neurosis, and I can have - he gave them to me, phenobarbitone tablets, you take two a day one night and morning. This went on for about 3 months and I ended up having a row with him. I says, 'If you reckon I'm suffering from neuroses why don't you send me down to Glenmore Asylum? Because that's where they were sending the boys who had genuinely a neurotic condition. And they were treating them with shock treatment and it was very successful. Quite a few of my mates went down there for shock treatment. We had a row and I threatened to pull his nose for him. And he reported to veteran affairs that I was - the repatriation department they called it then, that I was a recalcitrant patient. And I said to my sister, - this vomiting attack has gone on I suppose 4 or 5 months - I said, 'Who's a good doctor?' And she sent me to her doctor who was in Maxim Street West Ryde and I went to see him and he said, 'Come back at half past eight tonight,' and I said 'Right'. He said, 'Don't ring on the surgery door, go in the front door'. And he took me into his lounge room, introduced me to his wife. 'Would you like a cup of coffee?' So we sat in the lounge having coffee, and he said, 'I want you to tell me your story, right from the time you were a POW'. He said, 'Well I think we'll send you up to Ryde Hospital and we want certain tests done', which I did. Swallowed the snake as they call it.

Q: Barium meal?

No – yeah I had a little meal and they'd take - a sandwich - and they'd take fluid off your stomach and about an hour after that you'd have something else to eat and they'd take fluid off your stomach and they took blood tests and they took urine test. I don't know what tests they didn't do, but it was spread over a fortnight. 'We'll let your doctor know, we'll let your doctor know'. So the doctor - I get a phone call, 'Come and see me.' This is only a couple of months before I was to be married. So I went to see him and he said, 'You're dying of starvation'. He said, 'I know how you're eating because I've eaten at your sister's place. But that vomiting you have, you're breaking down the food you eat, but none of it's being digested through the system. What you vomit



up every morning is all the stuff that should be building you up and making you well.' So I was taking medicine.

Q: Vitamin tablets? What did he give you?

The main thing was aluminium oxide.

Q: He must have been a very good doctor. Do you remember his name?

Louey Owen.

Q: And where was his practice?

Maxim Street, West Ryde.

Q: Did you think he was particularly good for the times?

Well he had a reputation for being good for his times.

Q: And gradually you got better?

I gradually got better.

Q: Aluminium?

Yeah, I think they called it aluminium oxide, it was a tablet, nearly as big as your finger. About that thick. I was on some other medicine, I don't know what it was now. I put on weight but I never went above ten stone four or something for years. And then all of a sudden I blew up. I went up to 15 stone.

Q: Doctor Owen brought your two children into the world?

Well I went in to pay a bill on one occasion on a Saturday morning. It was about ten pound. And when I paid him and collected the receipt he said to me, 'Are you a betting man?' I said, 'No'. He says, 'Well be a betting man tonight'. He was a dog owner. He says, 'I've got a dog that's going round tonight and he'll be a good price, you'll get all this money back and plus.' And I said this to Jean and she wasn't a betting woman either, she said, 'Wouldn't do any harm I don't suppose, have a couple of pound on it'. Which I did with the local S.P. bookmaker, and won 20 quid. (Laughs) That was the type of bloke he was but he was a good doctor. He got into trouble at Ryde Hospital and he was scratched off the Honorary list.

Q: What was that for?

Because he was always the one being carried out and he told the matron she was a bloody fool.



Q: This was in the early 1950's was it?

It would be '49 - '50, yeah.

Q: He obviously had a reputation?

Any rate the matron got into trouble over it. He had a court case against the hospital to be reinstated on the Honorary list which he did, but he died - he was only a young man and he had a similar trouble to me and in about '54 - '55 he died. Only a young man.

END OF INTERVIEW