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Oral History -
An Interview with
Joe Ekerick

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Interviewee: Joe Ekerick

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Q: Earliest childhood memories, at the market garden where you lived, was that in Cressy Road?

A: That was the corner of Cressy Road and Great North Road in those days. It was four acres, there was another part containing two acres which was left to my Uncle Steve, my parents had to sell that and send him the money. After that, we only had four acres then. It was the front part nearest to Victoria Road, well Great North Road - the market garden part, then the house was back quite a bit, half way along, it was leased.(?) We lived in an old stone house, built by my grandfather and my father, and my grandfather was a stone mason.

Q: Built of sandstone?

Yeah. The sandstone is still used in two of the houses there now. The house that my mother originally moved and we had a bit of a new house and the sandstone used in the foundations of that. And there someone's using the foundation where my sister Emelda Hanenberry? now lives, some of the stones are used in the foundation of her house too which was next door to that.

Q: So when was the house, where you were born, demolished?

I was in the butcher's shop. We had the corner shop there as a mixed business, my mother ran that. I, for one, and my sister and brother all agreed that the time Mum retired, so we demolished the old house. We didn't pay for it. My mother paid for it, and built a new house there. We were all still single and living at home then, so it was quite a fairly substantial place, practically in almost the same spot where the old stone place was.

Q: The old stone place would have probably been built when your parents first got married by your father and grandfather?

I remember, before my mum and dad got married it would have been built, as my grandfather, I think, lived in there, father lived in there before mum married him. My mother was working for the Presbytery, as a house keeper.

Q: Which Presbytery was that?

Ryde, St Charles. She worked for the Parish Priest family before she came to Ryde. The Parish priest, was Father Gell that was, his parents lived up in Kings Cross, Bayswater Road, his parents lived Bayswater Road, and my mother worked for them. My mother came from down the south coast near Pambula. She got the job up there. I have a suspicion that she had a sister, a nun who was one of the Daughters - the Sisters of Charity at Potts Point. I think she might have got the job for her, I don't know, I'm just surmising that. But Mum came and worked for this Gell family at Kings Cross, and that's how she came to come to Ryde. Father Gell was made parish priest in Ryde, and she came to work for him there, I don't know how, or why or when. I don't know how exactly or why or when, the exact date of that.

Q: She gave that up when she got married?

She gave it up when she got married, that's where she met Dad, in Ryde of course. Dad lived - Cressy Road is very close to the church where dad lived. The church is where it is now, the Presbytery was.

Q: Can you tell me your memories of the market garden, what was grown and what did it look like?

We used to grow peas, potatoes and beans and we used to 'hill' them and all that. Victoria Road back as far as the house and bit behind the house, then we had fowl yards behind that. I think we had 40 chooks or something. We used to sell eggs, and behind that again, we used to have a cow paddock, where we used to keep a cow. We had a Jersey cow always.

Q: Did you milk it?

I used to milk before and after school, at one stage, all the time, and at another time before and after school.

Q: Were you a good milker?

I learnt to milk at any rate. I don't know if I could do it now. It's a bit of an art you know. To do it took a bit to learn.

Q: Did your father hold another job down, or did the market garden give him sufficient living to support the family?

Well, I don't know if I could say that, it did for a long while at any rate. Then we opened, as a matter of fact, we used to have a stall just near the old house. People used to come into the Field of Mars Cemetery mostly from Balmain on the tram. A lot of people would go up Cressy Road, would walk up to the Field of Mars to visit their relatives. We used to have a sort of a wooden stall there, where we had soft drinks and things like that. And then of course when we built the corner shop, they used to come in there.

Q: Tell us about the corner shop, exactly where was it located?

Right exactly on the corner of Cressy Road and Victoria Road. It was with a dwelling attached, and three bedrooms in it. And behind the shop was a lounge room, not a terribly large lounge room for the family actually we had a fire place in it too and behind that was... we had a hall that went right through the centre of the house, and there's the three bedrooms on the left hand side as you walked through the front door. There is the shop on the other side of the road, then a lounge room, then a kitchen where we used to cook and eat and everything, then there was a small back verandah and you go down four or five steps, where we had a laundry. It was a laundry and bathroom combined, with a gas copper. We used to have to heat the copper to have a bath. Or we had a cold shower only. There was a shower over the bath, but there was only cold water in that, and we used to, you'd have a bath and heat the copper up for that, and then there were washtubs along side the copper and a bench there too.

Q: Now about when was this shop built, do you remember how old you would have been?

Yes, I would have been still in primary school. I would have been 10 or 12, something like that.

Q: So this is probably the early 1920s we're talking about?

Oh yes it would be yes.

Q: So your father is running the market garden, at this time, and your mother was running the corner shop.

Yes, Mum used to run the corner shop. We used to help her at times. We used to have to serve customers and that too.

Q: Did you enjoy doing that?

I don't say that I enjoyed it. It was a chore you know.

Q They used to give you a bit of pocket money for that too?

No really we used to get a penny a week, the pocket money, all the kids, if I remember rightly in those days but we didn't get paid to work in the shop or anything.

Q: So when you built the corner shop what happened to the old stone house? Who lived in that then?

It was let to two people. They might have had a horse, Blackly was the last one, I think, was their name. I can't remember the first person's name. There were only two tenants. They moved suddenly got another tenant.

Q: So it must have been a very busy family your mother occupied with the corner shop and your father with market garden.

Yeah. It was quite busy. I wasn't the only one to help too, but I was the eldest I suppose I copped the most, the others copped a bit too, because my eldest sister is only 18 months younger than me, so she would have had to do a fair bit too, probably more helping mum, well she served in the shop too.

Q: What sort of jobs would you help your father with in the market garden, did you have many tasks there?

I used to have to pick peas and beans at times perhaps help hill all vegetables when they were growing. The peas, the beans you hill them so when they grow they fall down. You get a chipping hoe - you drag the soil up on one side and then along on the other side.....forms a hill so they stand up better. Peas and beans you would hill. We also used to grow pumpkins ... cabbages ... cauliflowers. I remember one year my parents were ecstatic. They had a good crop of cauliflowers, and everyone else's cauliflowers had some disease in it or something and they got a terrific price for their cauliflowers. All ours were all good, and everyone else had trouble with them or something.

Q: Now the poultry that was a commercial concern?

No, we just sold the eggs. We didn't send the eggs away, just sold them at the old stall. We used to have the old stall before we had the shop, then we used to sell them through the shop.

Q: Was this before the old Egg Board days?

Yes it was before the old Egg Board days.

Q: You weren't rearing chicks or any that sort of things, having incubators.

Oh no, they had a incubator and never used it in my time, they used it before my time I think, but we used to set our hen, no you just had to make sure she was fed, let her out to have a feed, and she'll go back and sit on the eggs again.

Q: Tell me about the corner shop, what sort of things did your mother sell?

It was a typical corner shop. All sorts of groceries and soft drinks and biscuits and things like that and cakes and a few small goods too, like devon sausage and cheese, we used to have in the showcase and we had milk. This was the Milk Board days. You had to have a wooden container on the counter, contained a bucket and you had a special metre hooked on the bucket, metre it out you know and it had to be fly-proof sort of thing.

Q: And that was milk from your cow? You were allowed to do that?

Milk from our cow, yes. I think dad had to put cement in the stable, in the shed when we used to have to milk them, when that came in, so it wasn't always so, but when that Milk Board came along you had to put cement in the stable, where we used to have to milk the cow.

Q: And that was of course for hygiene reasons?

Yes.

Q: Do you ever remember it being inspected?

Vaguely, an inspector would come round, not too often any rate, but I have an idea they did come, but I can't remember exactly.

Q: Have you got any idea whether these were reasonably good businesses - both the market garden and the shop?

Oh, it was just a living I think. There was no fortune made out of it, I can assure you of that, that I know, that would be right there would be no fortune made, but we always managed to live, and eat all right and clothed all right.

Q: So can you tell me now, perhaps about going to school. You started school at St Charles Borromeo?

Yeah.

Q: Do you remember that very first day?

Oh, just vaguely. I didn't know I rather liked school. I knew nothing. Yes, I started school when I was six years of age. Now I think my mother, thought I'd be, because I was a bit of a shy kid, my mother thought I'd be a bit clearer on things. My sister started school with me. She was only four and a half. She always hated school, never liked school at all, always hated school, Mary did.

Q: I wonder why?

Perhaps because she started too young,, likely, I don't know. Mother took us both down together and we both started school together, I remember rightly now, yeah.

Q: You'd walk along to school every day together the two of you?

Yeah. It was across the road and a bit.

Q: Do you remember some of the things that you learnt at school and the methods of teaching?

All nuns at the schools then in those days. There were no lay teachers. I remember the first class, I can't remember much better, but the second class, that be the class I made my first communion, Sister Brondavida??? A lovely woman she was, I loved her. Nuns are all right but I particularly liked her. She trained us to be an altar boy too. I made an altar boy.

Q: Now was that considered a privilege, to be an altar boy?

I think so, yeah.

Q: And were certain families asked? ....?

Yeah, I think they picked them out from families who were pretty constant in their religion.

Q: Do you remember the first day you served at Mass as an altar boy?

Yes.

Q: The gear? The ..sauterne...? Yeah wearing the, having it all starched?

Was it starched? Of course the sauterne wouldn't be, we had black ones then, the altar boys when I first served and of course, with white surplice. But later on we got a curate there a Father Fitzgerald. He was very fussy and trained the altar boys. He was very particular about the training. Of course the boys used to love it too. As a matter of fact they used to have an altar boys' meeting every week then. We used to get in .....? before we arrived.....? around the cemetery and plant trees and things like that. When he arrived of course he would pull us in line, but that was when we got red sauternes, and that then. Got red sauternes, yeah we all had to get red sauternes. My parents had to make them of course.

Q: Do you remember thinking it as a privilege or a status symbol, where you pleased to be an altar boy, or was it just a chore?

Oh, it was just a chore. I just took as it came sort of thing. Nothing was easy going.

Q: Did you have any trouble learning the Latin responses?

Oh no no, no trouble. I learnt them all right. Matter of fact I was p... in languages I've got a smattering of German, French, Italian and Greek, and the smattering not the conversation part, by my eldest is fluent in Italian and my second eldest is fluent in French, and my youngest daughter, who lives in Chile, I think she would be fluent in Spanish now, because, my second

daughter went over to visit her and she went shopping, and she said Fran managed all right with her Spanish in the shopping and that.

Q: Can you tell me about your first communion day, do remember that day?

Oh yes, I remember that all right, that was a great day. I enjoyed that.

Q: What did you wear?

I couldn't tell you what I wore.

Q: What was the most exciting thing about the day for you?

We had a bit of a breakfast in the school hall or something, it was a great day, really one of the big days in my life I reckon. I remember that well.

Q: You would have been seven?

Seven I was, yes.

Q: Do you remember the preparation before hand, the instruction?

Oh yes, yeah Sister Bonaventa? prepared us for that.

Q: Now as you went through the school what sort of discipline was used and how strict was it in the school?

Oh it was all right. I had no complaints. I had the cane, of course, like all - I couldn't complain about that, I've got a thing about men, some men complained about teasing ....set on ??? Because they gave a bit of a hiding at school or something. But I always think that if you do anything wrong you've got to be man enough to take the consequences. I don't reckon you're a man if you can't take the consequences and you play up.

Q: Do you remember what you got the cane for?

Not too much about that, didn't take much notice of it. ...? got the cane for not knowing things at times. I can't remember which one I played up and got the cane for now. I didn't play up that much really. I didn't get it too much for that.

Q: Do you remember wearing a uniform to school?

No, we didn't have a uniform in those days. Uniforms only came in later on.

Q: Did you wear shoes to school?

No, not when I first started. Later when you get into a higher classes you wore shoes. When I went to college, I had a uniform when I went to college. There was uniform there. St Charles in the primary there was no uniforms there,

then, but at Holy Cross there was a uniform, we used to where knicker bockers, do you know them at all?

Q: Could you describe what they look like?

They come in and tuck in your socks, you had long, what do they call those socks, the long socks that come up nearly to your knees and the knicker bockers tuck in top of the socks, golf socks they call them, that's at Holy Cross.

Q: And what was on top, a shirt?

They had a coat. I can't particularly think of what the coat was like now. I just think we must have had a pin on badge. I'm not certain about that now. We had a hat with a band on it, with a red band on it, with a Holy Cross College on the front.

Q: Was that like a boater hat?

No it wasn't a boater, no, we didn't wear boaters at Holy Cross.

Q: It was like a felt hat?

A felt hat, yeah.

Q: When you were saying that you went to school in the early years without shoes, do you think that is because of necessity because they couldn't afford shoes or you just liked going without shoes for the freedom?

Both.

Q: Do you remember if your sister wore shoes, when she started?

I don't really remember. I think the girls would have worn shoes more than the boys, most, a lot of the boys went to the schools barefooted in the early days, but I think the girls wore shoes I think, I couldn't swear to it though.

Q: How old would you have been if you went to Holy Cross, over the road?

I went to Six Class at St Charles so what would I have been?

Q: About 12?

About that, yeah, roughly.

Q: Did you notice the difference with the brothers, was the discipline stricter, for example or the teaching methods different?

Oh, I'd say the teaching methods were just slightly different, but I don't different any stricter it was about the same, what with the names.

Q: Do you remember anything you particularly enjoyed about the school?

....? When I grew up and I was in the butcher's shop there, by this time I had bought a car, you see, and the nuns ring me up and ask me, to run a couple of nuns up to Parramatta, the nuns are common t Ryde, because the same, Parramatta Mercies, you see, run a couple of nuns to Parramatta. This day they rang up, it was a Saturday afternoon the shop was shut, so Sister Calasapes? she taught me in sixth class, she good teacher too a lovely women. And I'm driving out Victoria Road past (what's the pub out there near the church, the Family Inn?) there was a lot of cars parked there. This was the days when beer was scarce, and passed them about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and the sisters are going, 'Oh a lot of people are going to confession at the church here'. The young nun laughed because the beer was at this pub and all the other pubs were closed. The young nun woke up straight away, the cars were all at the pub, because they had beer on, all the other pubs were closed.

Q: Do you remember your family helping the nuns out a bit, for example in some areas if you were on a dairy farm you took milk to the nuns. Did your family take ...?

Yeah. They used to take vegetables out at the time, she take .....? Presbytery to the priest, they'd send something down there too sometimes, they had vegetables to spare there.

Q: Was religion a very important part of your family life?

Definitely was, definitely.

Q: Could you describe a Sunday to me, perhaps? What was the family routine on a Sunday?

When we were young of course, our parents used to take us to Mass, but later on, we grow up we'd go to Mass on our own accord. I'd advise the alter boys to serve the particular mass? Course it was all morning mass in those days, There really on two masses, one curate. There were only two masses, 7 and 10 and something like.

Q: Did you get up and go to the 7 o'clock when you were little?

Yes, mostly did, almost always, cause you'd go...? 7 o'clock, you had a fast in those days and 10 o'clock was a bit long to fast, and later on I sang in a choir there when I was ...

Q: Could you please explain what was fasting, I know what it is, but for other people.

You had to fast from midnight. You couldn't even have a drink of water after midnight.

Q: And that's before going to communion?

Yeah, if you broke your fast you never went to communion, if you actually broke your fast. If you're going out somewhere to a dance or something you had to make sure you knocked off drinking at 12 o'clock.

Q: And what about confession? Did the family go regularly to confession together?

Yes. Not particularly together I think, always regularly, I don't think we went together. Course we had the shop. Someone has to look after the shop too you know, you couldn't go all together as far as that was concerned. Because the shop used to be opened till about 9 o'clock at night I think, from 6 in the morning till 9 at night a mixed business.

Q: On Sundays would it be closed all day then?

No, it wouldn't be closed all day. It used to be closed Sunday morning, I think. I can't remember what time we opened in the morning now. I think we did open fairly early, some-one used to had to say Aaron? mind the shop I think, perhaps not as quite as early as the week day. ....say, some people would call in and buy something coming home from Mass you know, probably open about 7 o'clock or something. But the week day we used to open at 6. I remember that well.

Q: And did you sell newspapers?

No, we didn't sell newspapers. I think they tried to get a license to sell, but they never got it.

Q: On Sundays would you come home and have a hot roast Sunday lunch?

Yes, we did for years at any rate, not later on in life, but in those days we did, almost always had a baked dinner on Sundays.

Q: Did your parents rest on Sunday, were you conscious of them resting you father not going to dig in the garden?

Yeah, poor all Dad, would put his glasses on and sit in the rocking chair and read in a Sunday afternoon. That's when we lived in the old house, when I was young, before we moved to the shop ...? but he would in the shop too, that's right.

Q: And what would your mother do on Sunday afternoons?

Well, we had to open the shop on Sunday afternoon, when we moved into the shop, but before we moved into the shop, we relaxed on a Sunday. We only did the necessary things. Mum cooked course, beds had to be made, we made our own beds probably, after a certain age any way we did.

Q: Talking about the importance of religion in your family. Did your family, perhaps, say the Rosary regularly?

Regularly every night. After tea.

Q: Would you all kneel down?

Yes.

Q: Do you remember as a kid enjoying it, or having no feeling about it or being, getting impatient with it?

Oh sometimes I think a bit of a nuisance. But mostly I thought it was all right. You got to recognise there exist a God, you got to get with Jesus? sort of thing.

Q: Going back to Holy Cross College, how many years did you stay there?

I only went up to third year. I didn't pass Intermediate as a matter of fact. I got to third year. I was probably a bit of a lazy student or something. I don't know but the Brothers spoke to Mum and me. He said, 'I think Joe would fail the Intermediate. You'd better send him back next year, and good pass, next year he does third year over again', but it didn't eventuate, I went back the next year but on the last day of school was St Patrick's day, the Patrician Brothers was St Patrick's, they always went for a picnic on St Patrick's day, to the zoo? and Apple gardens, all the students did. And I went to that picnic, and when I came home my mother took sick and she had to go into hospital. She had one of the contagious diseases. She had to go to the Coast Hospital. I think it was scarlet fever. I don't know what it was. It was one of those contagious diseases. She had to go to the Coast Hospital, and I looked after the shop, because Dad was doing the market garden, and I don't think Dad liked serving in the shop anyway, but I looked after the shop, managed the shop. I'd be 14 at the time, I think. No I must have been more. I must have been 16. I was 16

when I left school, that's right. I managed the shop whilst Mum was in hospital, for about 2 or 3 weeks, about 3 weeks I think she was in hospital.

Q: And did you feel like that was a big responsibility, or did you feel quite capable of that at that age?

Oh both, I don't know I think I was responsible. I think I was, I think I was capable,.... I don't know what the others thought. I think I was capable. The olds(?) used to give me a hand of course, my sister and my brother too I suppose.

Q: Anyone come in and try to put it over you seeing a kid run the shop?

Not that I can remember.

Q: So at 16, were you a big lad at that age?

I was full size big yeah? I was fairly tall for my age I think, took after my father, in fact my father was about my height, what I am now my father was too. Mum was shorter.

Q: Sixteen's quite old to be leaving school in those days, people were leaving much before that, 14?

Oh yeah, a lot of them left at 14, never went to the Intermediate year.

Q: Did you feel that it was special to go on?

Yeah I thought it was a privilege, I suppose, yeah.

Q: So you were probably quite bright were you? But a little bit lazy?

Medium I suppose, yeah perhaps so, you might have it there.

Q: So your dad went to the Coast Hospital?

Yes he had a fall, he was an old man then, and he was at the Coast Hospital. We used to go up and visit him. I remember it was August, and it was a bad time, a lot of people were dying of pneumonia in those days. They were taking bodies out all the time in Dad's ward. He broke his leg I think it was. He got over it, but there was...every time we'd go to visit him we knew people, some of them had died, and some of them had gone home of course, some of them had died of pneumonia. They used to die of pneumonia in those days.

Q: Were you quite young when this happened?

I don't know when it happened. I can't remember what year that was.

Q: Would you have been about 9. You're not talking about the 1919 flu epidemic.

No, that was after Mum was in hospital. That was later on. I would have been working by then.

Q: Late 20s or early 30s?

Yeah, yeah.

Q: Going back, do you remember that 1919 flu epidemic? You would have been 8 at the time?

Oh yes, I remember that. We used all have to wear masks. And you'd go to Mass on the Sunday in the open air. You couldn't go to church. We all had to wear masks, in the open air, for one or two Sundays, not for long.

Q: That was because of the health regulations?

Health regulations, yeah. They held the Mass in the school yard.

Q: Did any of your family or friends get infected by the epidemic?

No, fortunately, but there was great - I believe there was a traffic jam getting out... fill the ... cemetery with the horses and coaches, that many people being buried when it was when that was on. I didn't see that but heard people talk about it.

Q: Did you know anyone personally who died?

From the epidemic? Can't think of anyone any way, none of our family fortunately, but I can't think of anyone who died from it.

Q: And do you remember people walking the streets with masks?

Oh yes, I remember that, yeah.

Q: Did you have to go to school with a mask on?

Yeah, yeah, I don't know whether they closed the school, closed the school down for a week or so, but it seems to me they might have done, or for a few days or something, but I know I had to go to school in a mask and all that, yes.

Q: As a kid were you pulling it off, did you stick to the regulations.

I suppose I pulled it off at time, but mostly I stuck to the regulations. They're there for your protection ....

Q: You remember the end of WW1 in 1918?

We were still in the old house then. Yes I had a cousin came back, wounded in action. I think the war had ended by the time he got back here. He lived down the South Coast, and he called in on us on the way home. In uniform. He got a bullet through his hand or something.

Q: Had he been on the Western front?

I don't know what front he'd been on. I was a bit too young to realise that, whether he was on the Western front or not. But he died at ninety years of age, got killed by a car on the Princes Highway. They lived on the Princes Highway actually. He did. The other side of Eden, when he was married like, he came from the other side of Eden, between Eden and Kambulla where the family home was, but when he married and that he had a property on the other side of Eden. As a matter of fact the wife and I called on him when we were driving back from Melbourne. Come back through the Princes Highway. Oh he was dead then when we called, his wife Edna, we called on her.

Q: Do you remember the celebrations at the end of WW1?

I remember there were celebrations. I definitely remember that.

Q: Any marches you remember taking part as a school child in a march?

I didn't take part in any march, no. But I think there were some marches and that, but I didn't - no - I wasn't mixed up in that.

Q: Now another significant thing that happened in 1925 when you were at school was the International Eucharistic Congress, being a Catholic I just wondered if you remembered that at all. You would have been about fourteen at the time. Have you got a memory of that?

When they were getting ready for it, they had a celebration procession, benediction. They marched from the Gladesville Catholic Church to Holy Cross College. And they had the Benediction out on the oval at Holy Cross. I carried the crucifix and led the procession from Our Lady of Peace at Gladesville up to Holy Cross College.

Q: Because you were an alter boy?

Yes, just before I got too old for it.

Q: Can you tell me about how you felt that day and what you saw? That must have been a real privilege to lead the procession.

Well, I didn't think that much of it, I just did it, you know.

Q: Tell me about the procession, what you saw and heard, and the sights and sounds of it.

Oh well the Children of Mary were all done up in their gear of course, the Children of Mary's gear in those days, and there were all sorts of other people too you know following them, ordinary people and the priests were there of course too.

Q: So you would have been first in the procession, what did you carry, a Cross?

I carried a Cross, the crucifix, holding it up in the air sort of thing. I have a picture somewhere here of me.

Q: It would be good to see that.

I'll have to start digging to find it.

Q: After you came with the Cross who came immediately after you?

The other alter boys. (words too difficult to transcribe) I don't know whether they had them in the procession or not but there were alter boys behind me, and then the priests I think.

Q: It always gives that distinctive smell to the Catholic's procession doesn't it?

Yeah - I can't remember whether they had the ???? there or not, they had them for the Benediction of course.

Q: And as they walked along were they chanting or was there singing or chanting? What was the sound as the procession made its way up the road?

[break in tape]

Q: Before we stopped there for a break, we'd been talking about the International Eucharistic Congress and you being the lead boy in the procession. And I was saying to you, do you remember the priests chanting or there being singing or bells or ringing as you were going along?

There were no bells. There was singing of hymns.

Q: Do you remember the hymns? Would it have been in Latin or English?

I think the hymns were in English as they were going along, yeah, but I'm not certain.

Q: Were you singing as well?

No I wouldn't be singing, no.

Q: Your job was just to -

Lead the procession, keep the pace right you know. Things like that. Watch that I didn't march too far ahead. (laughs).

Q: You mentioned the Children of Mary being there in the procession. Can you just tell us what the Children of Mary were and what they wore?

They wore a blue cape, sort of thing, they threw over their shoulders. My sister Pat, all my sisters joined the Children of Mary eventually you know, when they come to the age. There's a special Mass once a month. They'd all sit in one group together.

Q: Were they all dressed in white?

Yes and a veil too, that's right and the blue cloak, yeah.

Q: And this was a special group for girls?

Yeah for girls, yeah, teenage girls, I suppose you might say.

Q: So they were all in the procession and would there have been a whole group of nuns perhaps in the procession as well?

No the nuns didn't go in those days to the processions I don't think, they used to stay in their convent I think.

Q: And all the school children, would they have been there? And all the parishioners?

Oh all the parishioners were there. Can't remember if there were school children there as such, I can't remember. But the parishioners were there and the brothers were there too, mmm, from the Holy Cross.

Q: And then when you came up to St Charles would you have had Mass then? In the church?

Oh no the procession went to the Holy Cross, we had Benediction on the oval.

Q: Oh that's right, you said that, sorry, yes.

Yes we had Benediction on the oval, my brother was there, two of us in the procession as an alter boy at that time. There is a picture of my brother and myself in the one picture I think, in the procession. We were amongst the alter boys there.

Q: And you've got the picture here?

Probably have.

Q: Oh good. And can you explain to us for the record, about Benediction, what exactly happened at Benediction?

Well you sing two hymns before the Blessing.

Q: It's a Latin word for Blessing of course, isn't it? Yes it is. And so the two hymns were sung and then what would happen?

The priest would raise the Monstrance up and make the Sign of the Cross right and left. The Sign of the Cross with the Monstrance. And the people would all bow down.

Q: And the Monstrance is a big, sort of circular thing on a stand, circular with a -

- yeah - things come out, like fire coming out from it or something like that. And then they'd sing another hymn after the Blessing too.

Q: And did they have the church bells going before that or during that do you remember?

No only the bell on the alter, you'd ring the bell when the priest was giving the Blessing. You'd ring the bell three times, the little bell you used to have on the alter. Sometimes they had a bell, sometimes they had a gong. Used to hit the gong with a stick with a leather coating on it.

Q: Did that occur in Lent or different times, the gong? Was that a different time to when you had the bell?

Oh no, they only had one or the other. They had the gong and they got rid of the bell and got the gong. That was at St Charles. We had the gong when I left the alter. The bell was earlier on. There were three bells on a little stand and you'd just shake it like that. I don't know what the idea was getting the gong, but - practical I suppose. (laughs).

Q: Now we've been talking about the importance of religion in your family, your life and your family's life. Do you remember religious bigotry at that time? Do you remember hearing perhaps from your parents?

From my parents definitely, but things weren't bad when I was young. There was a bit of bigotry about, but not much. As a matter of fact I believe some Masons were bigots but I knew a lot of Masons who were not bigoted at all. When I had my shop, my business, I had it on my own then. I got this bloke to come out and work for me. I got him when we had a holiday when me cousin

got married and had his honeymoon and we had to go to Manly. I got this bloke to come out and he was a Mason and we always got on well together. He worked for me for a good few years, I can't remember how many years now (long pause). Oh I know, the war came and I had two horse and carts on the road and they put a restriction on delivery when the war came. So I wasn't allowed to serve the customers on delivery. You couldn't serve anyone closer than a mile to the nearest butcher shop. So delivery was restricted, so I had to put the man off, then I just had a boy with me then.

Q: I'll come back to that in a minute. Can I get back to the subject of religious bigotry? What sort of things did your parents say? Did they talk about it much or?

Oh not much, but they'd talk about it. According to my father there was quite a bit of bigotry long before I was born. But after that things weren't so bad I think, but they did talk about it a bit.

Q: And as a kid did you mix with people from different religions? Or because you were at a Catholic school I suppose they were the main children that you mixed with?

Yeah the main children I mixed with. I didn't have much to do - I didn't dodge them or anything like that, I had, you know, talks with them, play with them and that, but not that much, mostly you played with your school mates.

Q: Now before we start talking about your business and how it was organised. Can you tell me a little bit about your first job, I know you were looking after the shop at first when your mother was sick in the Coast hospital, and then how did you become a butcher?

Oh well when my mother came out of hospital, I lost a fair bit of school and I thought I wouldn't bother going back I'd get a job. I decided to be a butcher, in fact my mother talked me into it, they owned a butcher shop.

Q: Your mother's family?

Yeah. And they thought a butcher shop, cause I'm butchering. I wasn't keen ever, I took it on you know, I didn't care that much. My mother suggested so I thought oh well I'll take on butchering. And of course jobs weren't easy to get in those days and the depression was coming on sort of thing, so the first job I got. I got the Herald you know and a bloke out at Waverley advertised for a boy so I fronted out there and he took me on. But I only worked for about three months there and things got bad in his business and he had to sack me. He was a good bloke, a Scotsman he was. He kept an interest in me when I had the shop later, he called in just to say good day. I only worked for him for three months. He's died since.

Q: We're talking about in 1927 now when you got that first job. So that was before the depression officially started, but as you say things were starting to get bad.

Yeah. So I got a job down at Tennyson. On the corner of Morrison Rd and Tennyson Rd.

Q: They hadn't advertised the position?

No my aunty used to deal there. She told him about me or something and he said, 'Righto', so he took me on and I only worked there for three months and things got bad. He had a delivery, a horse and cart, used to deliver around Hunters Hill. So things got bad and he had to put me off. He was a pommy this bloke, he was alright. His wife used to come in on a Saturday morning and do the till, you know? He told me later on, 'I wouldn't have put you off only this bloke who was doing the delivery was robbing him', and that's how things got bad for him. I got a job then through the Herald again. A bloke advertised down in Circular Quay. He advertised for six boys or something. I got down there and there were about twenty boys there (laughs). Looking for a job. Cecil Lewis Davis, good bloke. At any rate he took me on. So I had to front down to W.A. Grubbs. It was called W.A. Grubb and Co. That wasn't his name, that was the name before and he kept the name going. It was Cecil Lewis Davis was the proprietor. He had a few shops.

Q: It was a butcher shop at Circular Quay? Where exactly?

In George St, just where the tram used to turn to go down to the Quay, right where the tram used to turn down. One tram went ahead to Millers Pt and the tram to Circular Quay turned to the right past the wharves and that there and did a loop there. Anyhow I started work there and I was told to work on a block with another butcher and I only got up to mid steak or something and there was a summons, 'Joe, Mr Davis wants to see you up in the office'. He had an office upstairs. I went up and he said, 'Boy' (He used to call me boy.) 'I'm sending you up to Kings Cross to work. Albert's going up there with the truck with some meat you can go up there with him and work up there'. So I went to work - he had two shops up at Kings Cross. He had W.A. Grubbs and the Alberto Meat Emporium, 66 Darlinghurst Rd was where I went to.

Q: You said he was Jew, so this wasn't Kosher meat, this was just meat for anyone?

Yes, he sold Gentiles meat. In fact Grubb was all Gentiles but the Alberto, we sold Kosher meat there, and Gentile’s meat. I got an apprenticeship there and served me time there.

Q: So that's where you started your apprenticeship? Before that you hadn't been long enough at a place to be apprenticed?

No, I got apprenticed to him. Took five years. Got the sack when the depression came, and he'd sold out by then, and a bloke called Ian McCullum Gold bought him out. He became the member for Randwick later on in politics. The Labor member for Randwick.

Q: And he sacked you?

Yeah cause he had to pay me full pay then. He couldn't afford it I suppose, things were bad, you know? That's what it was.

Q: Each time when you had to change jobs. You know, when you got the sack, did you feel really down yourself, or were you aware enough to realise that it was the times.

Oh I realised it was the times, but I didn't like it of course. Matter of fact I got me photo taken, my second daughter lives in a block of units down Elizabeth Bay. I got me photo taken at the wheel of a T model panel wagon in front of her units. (laughs). I got the photo here on that pedestal where she lives now. And you see me mother worked at Kings Cross before in Bayswater Rd, so there's a bit of a connection there. And I had an aunt, my Godmother was in charge of St ???? Church, it was part of St Mary's Cathedral parish in those days. She was the caretaker of the church, she owned an old house there next door to St ????. She never married. Her father used to work in the City Council with a horse and dray or something. Aunty Lena we used to call her, she wasn't a blood relation she was a friend of my mother's, that's how she came to be my Godmother.

Q: Now how did you come to start up your own business? How did you get the capital for that?

Oh well I went into partnership with a cousin of mine. And it cost me fifty pound and he put fifty pound in and we bought this bloke out. He was trying to sell the business and my parents owned the property. Me cousin seemed to want to be in on it too, in fact he approached me, more than me approaching him I think. So we went in together.

Q: Now tell me exactly where this was. On Victoria Rd was it?

Just next door to the shop on the corner, there's home units there now.

Q: So it was part of the block that was the old market garden?

Yeah. Part of the old market garden block.

Q: And had this man who was selling up, had he built the butcher shop on that site or had your father -

- my parents owned it. They bought the shop. Dad was getting too old to work the market garden.

Q: Oh so it's not the corner shop you were talking about before?

No. Well dad was getting too old to work the market garden, so they decided to build the butcher shop, to let, and the cottage next door, they built that. They had two cottages, to let, for income sort of thing. My father was twenty years older than my mother.

Q: So when you came into it, they owned the land and the shop?

Yes, I used to pay my parents rent as a matter of fact.

Q: Now can you tell me what it was like running this business?

Oh it was hard. Oh yes. As a matter of fact we were in the business three months before we got a shilling for ourselves out of it. (laughs). Never got a penny for three months.

Q: Where were you living at that time?

I was living at home, in Cressy Rd there in the new house me mother had built you know.

Q: At the back of the shop?

Yeah - well - there was another place in between. My sister and her husband built that when they got married. My parents gave them a block of land and they built a house on it.

Q: So you didn't have to pay your parents board, at least you had somewhere to live.

Yes I had somewhere to live. I don't think I paid board at first for a while, I can't remember now. That would have hurt me a bit that I couldn't do it, but that was the case. My mother wouldn't charge me much board, we used to have arguments I used to want to pay her more and she'd say no. (laughs).

Q: Tell me about the routine of running a business like that, a butcher shop? For example, where would you go to get the meat? Would it be delivered? Or would you collect it? What wholesalers did you use?

Yes well as a matter of fact I only went to market occasionally to look at it, mostly it was supplied over the phone. I had particular blokes I could rely on, I could buy from. I used to buy my beef from Nichols Bros. and my lambs I

bought from Colonial Wholesale for a while and then I changed to P.D. Mulligan. Bought them off him later on. I can't remember how long it was before I changed. And then later on after me cousin left and we split up and I used to go down to the market and just occasionally go to Riverstone Depot down at Hay St in Sydney.

Q: Is that the market you're talking about?

Yes Riverstone's had their own market down there. Riverstone Meat Co.

Q: Who were they?

They were an English firm. What's the name? The ones who had the big property in the Northern Territory? Vesty's. Vesty's owned it. They had a big slaughterhouse up at Riverstone. They slaughtered their own meat as well as - of course there were big abattoirs at Homebush too. I used to go across there occasionally. I drove a horse and cart across there sometimes.

Q: Across the Ryde Bridge, after it was built?

Yeah - across the punt before. (laughs). We used to deliver to customers in Rhodes. In the punt with the horse and cart.

Q: Now tell me about the routine of delivery? Would that be a special day every week, or would it be every day?

In those hard times it was every day. Six days a week. They were the slavery days I can tell you, we worked some long hours there for little money. It was an order cart, not a cutting cart. There were some cutting carts about where they'd cut the meat for the customers. I never had one of them.

Q: What do you mean?

Well they'd have a block of meat in a big van. A four wheel van. And they'd go to the customer and the customer would ask to have it cut for them. There used to be one around Hunters Hill, but I don't think there was one in Ryde. But with the order cart, you'd deliver meat one day and take the order for the next day while you were there. And the next day you brought the next order out and so forth, that's the way it went on.

Q: Of course there was no fridges. You forget don't you?

Yes, well we had ice chests in those days. But war time was actually best time for the butcher shop.

Q: Was it?

Yes because there was restrictions on delivery and restrictions on meat too, you put in a quote and you couldn't buy more than your quota, you had to make a statement of what you'd sold before they brought it in you know. If you

knew what was going to have you could have... - (laughs). Some did do that I think. Saying you were selling more than you were. But you were only allowed to sell the same amount of meat as what you were selling before when the quota came in. I used to have to shut the shop one day a week. You were restricted with delivery, you couldn't serve anyone who lived closer than the nearest butcher shop. We only delivered three days a week then which made it much easier.

Q: So the deliveries were cut down in order to save on petrol, but were you using a vehicle by this stage, or were you on the horse and cart?

The horse and cart.

Q: Well I can't see - why would they restrict you on delivery if it was only on horse and cart?

To save labour. Yeah, we were short on labour you know. The men were going to the front and that. As a matter of fact when the war broke out I was a sergeant in the army you know. In the army service Corp, because I was a butcher.

Q: A weekend sort of thing?

Yes you'd go to camp every year. I was called up, you had no choice. You were called up, you had to do twelve months as a cadet, a senior cadet. You had to do twelve months service, you'd do half the time in your own time, like on a Saturday afternoon, and half the time on the bosses time, and you couldn't sack him because he had to go. You had no choice. I was an apprentice at the time too, so I got Wednesday afternoon off to go and do me military training.

Q: Oh so this was between the wars?

This was before the war broke out. Yeah. Between the wars as you say, yeah. I was a senior cadet and you only did the twelve months and then you joined the Citizen Forces, and you had no choice, you had to join them too. You weren't paid as a senior cadet, but when you joined the Citizen Forces you got six bob a day. You had to do your camp and that, it was compulsory. You had to do your drill in your own time I think then, but you got paid for it. It was on Saturday afternoon. Not every Saturday, probably about every second Saturday. Then things got bad the depression got bad they found they couldn't afford to pay, the war hadn't broke out yet, so they made us voluntary. So I enjoyed army life. I stuck with it. I went in as a volunteer then. I couldn't go every year to camp because I had a business. Perhaps it was every second year I went to camp.

Q: What did you enjoy about it?

Oh just the company I suppose and that you know.

Q: Getting out in the country?

Yeah, in the country, I used to think of it as me holidays when I went out to camp.

Q: Cause you probably wouldn't have a holiday other times?

Yes in the army service Corp you see they had different places. What do you call them? The footsloggers? The infantry. You had to go to a certain camp you had no choice. In the army service Corp you had to supply meat to different battalions when you were a butcher. And I used to go to Maitland, three miles out of Maitland, full of houses now it is. I went to Rutherford to camp.

Q: Did you camp there? Put up tents? Or was there a permanent camp there?

Oh there was tents there, but there was a permanent camp too. We were sleeping in tents but they had buildings for the services like you know, for the butcher shop and all that. They were permanent buildings. There was a sloping block and the butcher shop was underneath surrounded by fly wire and that. I did one camp at Liverpool only. The other times I went to Maitland.

Q: What sort of things would you do when you away at the camp?

Oh go into town every night to a dance or something. (laughs). Or the pictures, or something like that. Have a few beers. One night I didn't go into town, stayed in with a bloke and we drank a bottle of rum between us. (laughs). I think we drank it raw, it was under-proof though. It wasn't over-proof. (laughs).

Q Slept well that night I suppose.

Yeah. (laughs).

Q: What did you do during the day at the camp?

Oh during the day I had to cut up the meat. Supply the meat to different units. There'd be a few battalions in town. Whichever place, Liverpool or Rutherford. Of course Liverpool was bigger.

Q: Oh so when you were away you weren't actually playing soldiers and running around with guns? You were having a bit of a holiday as well?

Yes, each battalion would give you their order, so much beef or whatever. You'd break up the beef and allot each lot to each battalion you know. There'd be three or four battalions in there I suppose up in Maitland. Yeah, I had to cut up the meat for em. The army service Corp had motor transport and horse transport and they used to deliver it.

Q: How would you go up to Maitland?

On the train. It was a free trip being military service.

Q: Would you go up in your uniform?

Yeah.

Q: Did you like putting on the uniform?

Oh I didn't care much. Couldn't say I was proud about it or anything like that. But I didn't mind it.

Q: So when the war broke out what impact did that have on you as a member of the - did you call it the CMF? Or what did you actually call it?

The ???? I think.

Q: Were you immediately pinpointed as someone who'd be a warden or did you have extra responsibilities?

Yes I became a warden later on. When the war broke out I was called up to do a months straight away. I had no option. I had me had me own business and I had to hire another bloke to do me work. I had to go to Penrith.

Q: Were you paid for the month's camp?

Oh yes, you got paid. I met me wife at Penrith as a matter of fact. (laughs). Yeah well - I had to do a month's camp and it nearly sent me broke. When I came back the business had gone flat. I had someone in charge, he was alright, but it’s not like being there yourself. [tape break]

Q: Joe last session we talking we were discussing the war and how you'd go up to Rutherford near Maitland for an army camp and then your business had to be run by somebody else while you away. I think we've probably finished talking about Maitland and the army camp hadn't we?

Well as far as Rutherford was concerned I still had a part in the business then I think. Later on when the war broke out I went to Penrith, where I met my wife. (laughs). Yes out at Penrith Showground, we had to do a month's camp there.

Q: And then you said coming back to the business you found it had flopped.

Yes that's right.

Q: So how did you manage to get things going again? Did you find that difficult?

Well then you see I had two horses and carts on the road. The war restrictions hadn't come on yet then. I had a boy - an 'advanced improver' he was driving one horse and cart and I did the other one meself and I had a butcher in the shop, a good reliable man. He managed while I was away but he couldn't help it going down, it went down anyway.

Q: Sorry, when you said, 'advanced improver' what do you mean?

Oh that means you've been three or four years in the trade. He wasn't an apprentice. With an apprentice you're bound down, but with an 'improver' you can sack them if you want to. Or he can leave. But with an apprentice they can't. He'd go one horse and cart, do Tennyson and Gladesville and part of North Ryde and I did Putney and West Ryde and all round there, Meadowbank. Shortly after things got worse in the war and the government brought in restrictions on delivery, you couldn't deliver to anyone who lived closer than a mile to the nearest butcher shop. So that made a big difference to my business, I had two carts on the road and a very small shop trade. There was no passing trade. So I had to put the man off. He didn't mind fortunately. He lived at Marrickville and it was a long journey from there. Anyhow he didn't care, he soon got another job. Butchers were scarce anyway. So it was just myself and the boy that ran the business then. I had just the one delivery so I had to put one of my carts away and only used the one horse, even though I still had the three horses.

Q: Were these draft horses?

Oh no light cart horses.

Q: Not quarter horses? Just ordinary horses.

One I bought with the business, old Bluey was his name. I had him the whole time I was in business and when I sold out the shop at the finish, I was told I should get him put down because his teeth were gone and all that so I got him put down and it nearly broke me heart because I had him all that time and he was a very quiet horse. A bit of a rogue, but a quiet horse and my children used to play with him and ride him round the yard. He wasn't a keen worker but he was a reliable horse.

Q: And who put him down?

I got a professional person to do it. Shot him there and took the carcass away. In the backyard.

Q: Oh, so you actually had to see it happen?

Yes I did, yeah. I built good stables there too. This was after the war was over I think. I had to decide to continue with horse delivery or go for motor delivery. You could serve customers anywhere when the war finished. Anyhow I decided I'd go with the houses, so I built stables, three loose boxes and a harness room. I did most of it meself. I got the contractors to put the foundations down. You couldn't get bricks so I had to use cement blocks. And if I say so myself I made a good job of it I think. You had to get second grade iron, you couldn't buy the best iron for roofing and all that sort of thing.

Q: Because of the building shortage?

Yeah materials were short. In fact the farrier reckoned I got the best horse stables in Ryde he reckoned. A lot of the farriers shops were closed down and he used to come from Leichhardt to my place to shoe the horses.

Q: Where was his business before?

In Gladesville in Victoria Rd. Between the Catholic Church and the Gladesville section there. In between there.

Q: And you never learnt to shoe the horses yourself?

Oh - well I put a slipper on meself, I hated doing it because you've gotta be so careful you don't them, put the nail in the wrong place and do some damage. If I couldn't get a farrier out and a horse might cast a shoe I'd have some second hand shoes and I'd nail them on meself, so he could do another one or two days work. I never appreciated doing it, but I did it. I never had any trouble fortunately.

Q: Ever get kicked?

Not seriously anyway. One of my sisters got kicked once, he gave her - that horse he was a bit of a - he was a good worker, reliable and a brainy horse - but if you didn't want a bite you walked behind him, if you didn't want a kick you walked in front of him you see. (laughs)

Q: When you decided to stick with a horse and cart after the war, did you feel that this was an unusual decision at this time? Would most people have been changing to motor transport?

A lot would have been, but it was about 50/50 then. I didn't think it was unusual. Mind you I think horse delivery if you've got a compact run, horse delivery would leave motor delivery for dead.

Q: In terms of economics?

Yes and serving customers. You'd serve about five customers, where you'd do two or three with the motor, you know, because you've got to get into the car and turn it on and move it up again. You just speak to the horse and it comes up to you. And you wouldn't have to get in the car. And this brainy horse I was talking about, you'd go to a dead end street, you'd serve a customer, and when you come out he'd turned around and was facing the right way ready to go again. And when the gate would click he'd walk and when you hit the step he'd be in full trot.

Q: He knew what to do, he was geared up for it? Did they go along with a nose bag on with chaff in it to -

- oh no, never used a nose bag. They had their feed before they went and they got a feed when they got back in the shop. On delivery days I'd get up at five in the morning to give em a feed, well there was only one working but you had to give em all a feed or else - (laughs). They'd be fighting over it. (laughs).

Q: Where did you get your horse feed from? Was there a produce store?

Yes, they used to deliver it to me.

Q: Ryde produce store would that have been? At Top Ryde?

No, there was one on the corner of Monash Rd Gladesville there and Victoria Rd. McClure was his name, Ted McClure.

Q: Now by this stage there would still have been some horses around. Was their waste disposal a problem in the street? Did you have to shovel it up as you went along?

No no no. People would come out and gather it, horse manure was scarce. You often saw people in the street gathering up the horse manure for fertiliser. With a wheelbarrow or something.

Q: At this stage, just what was the traffic like? Did you feel it was a bit scary with your horse perhaps shying if a car came too close?

Oh yes, they'd shy sometimes. One particular time going over to Rhodes a truck came past me with a great tarpaulin flapping around everywhere and he went past and the horse shied then. I controlled him of course.

Q: I suppose there was a low level of traffic though really.

Compared to now, yes. But Victoria Rd was always busy of course.

Q: After the war was there a fairly constant stream of traffic along Victoria Rd? Or did you have big breaks from the traffic?

Not so many big breaks, but not as busy as now. When I sold the shop and my wife and I moved out here, she reckoned it would drive her mad after living on a busy street, so quiet here. (laughs).

Q: Too quiet? Now thinking about the shop again. You were living at the back of the shop. Could you just explain to me what that accommodation was like? Was it upstairs as well?

No it was all on one level. They had a front door alongside the shop where you'd go through if the shop was shut, and you'd walk into the hallway and my bedroom was on the left hand side as you walked in, the shop was on the right. Then you'd come to the lounge room, and there was a door between the lounge room and the shop and you'd walk in between there, and then there was another bedroom off that lounge room. Later on I closed in the big back verandah to make another bedroom when the children arrived. And then there was a laundry and bathroom combined. One room just off the kitchen. We had an open fireplace in the kitchen where we used to eat. Off that was the bathroom and laundry, a couple of tubs and a gas copper and an old cement bath and we had a gas heater too for the hot water. I had a big tank, in the shop I had a water cooled frig and the water cooled frig sort of wasted water, but it was arranged though when the water was turned on to cool the motor down and when the motor, after the room was cold enough, and the motor turned off, well the water had turned off too. So I arranged a pipe to take that waste water to run into a tank. I had an 800 gallon water tank to gather the roof water and also the water from this frig went into that too. So we had a constant supply of water. And then I worked out that with the overflow from the tank I put a pipe line down so the water ran into my horse trough and kept it full.

Q: When you got married did your wife help you in the shop? Was she involved in the business?

Yes she did. Not full time of course, but she - see we had the delivery of course and she used to come in every morning and wrap the parcels and the man or the boy we had there would cut the meat. She would write the name on the parcel and also if they were a cash customer she would write the price.

Q: What would they be wrapped in? White butcher's paper?

White butcher's paper, and newspaper on top of that. And she'd just write in the corner the name and price for those who paid regularly, not for the account customers of course.

Q: Did the account customers pay weekly or monthly?

I did serve Holy Cross College and the Convent some time. They paid monthly, and the presbytery paid monthly. But I didn't serve them all the time, they used to give other butchers a turn too.

Q: Other Catholic butchers, or just other butchers?

Other Catholic butchers I think, the presbytery anyway. You know - parishioners. Most of the other customers were weekly.

Q: Did you have many bad debts in those days?

Oh there were a few, yes. Not many fortunately. I tried to be pretty shrewd.

Q: I suppose with some customers you would get to know, just to take the money rather than...

Oh yes, there were some customers you'd be wary of you know. The news gets around and you'd know your mark. You'd only give them so much credit and then if they didn't pay then you'd drop them. (laughs). In fact I've got the old books up there still. (laughs).

Q: Fancy keeping them all those years.

Yeah, I just put em up there.

Q: Now talking about WW2 again, you mentioned to me before you were a warden at one stage. Could you explain to me what the duties were? And why you were asked to be a warden?

Oh I volunteered of course, they asked for volunteers. We had to attend a few things. We had to do a session on first aid. There was a lot to do in the war time. Opposite to me there was an Orphanage and I was supposed to be in charge of them if there was you know, an air raid sort of thing. You wouldn't want to know. One night -

Q: - this was the Catholic St Brigid's?

Yes, they had about 100 orphans there and one night the air raid siren - I went to bed about twelve o'clock and at five past twelve I dozed off to sleep I think, and at ten past twelve the air raid siren went off and I never heard it. Only found out about it the next morning when I got up. As part of the Hibernians we dug trenches for the orphans to get into the trenches if there was a raid too. On a Saturday afternoon we'd dig trenches for the orphans to get in.

Q: When the air raid siren went, that wouldn't have been the night that the midget submarines came into Sydney Harbour?

Yes that would have been the night.

Q: Oh was it? Oh and you slept right through it all?

Slept right through it all. (laughter).

Q: Did anyone rap you over the knuckles for that?

No.

Q: (laughs). So the submarines coming into Sydney Harbour is a blank to you because you were asleep? (laughs).

Fortunately there was nothing ever serious as far as we were concerned.

Q: But no one came and tried to wake you up? None of the other people?

Nope - no one woke me.

Q: Now tell me about some of your duties as a warden. Did you have to keep a record of where the nearest car was, who had telephones, all those sorts of things?

No we never did anything like that. We had ten lectures on first aid, and the duties what to do and all that sort of thing. How you had to go round door to door and make sure the lights were off and all that. All the trams in those days were on half power too, the lights were really dull on the trams. So there wouldn't be too much light for the aeroplanes to find the place.

Q: Did you often go round and have to mention to people that they were showing lights?

No I didn't. There were no raids at all, it was just a precaution they were taking in case it got real serious.

Q: You went round to check, did you?

(pause) Not much. I think I might have just checked whether the lights were on but we didn't have much of the air raids at all in Sydney.

Q: Now are there any other things you'd like to mention about the war that had an impact on your life. For example, rationing. I notice you married during the war, was there any problem with your wife getting the correct gear. Did she dress as a bride, or was she unable to?

No she dressed as a bride. Mmm, yes. Everything went off alright. We had the reception at the parish hall there in Ryde. (laugh). There was a funny thing. She must have had a bit of a blue with her father or something, you know what women are like. (laughs) My mother gave the reception as a matter of fact.

Q: Oh, it's usually the bride's parents.

Yes, but she didn't have a mother. Her mother died while she was still at school. And she had a step-mother. I don't know why but she didn't seem to get on that well with her step-mother for some reason or other. I never knew of any arguments with her step-mother in the time I knew her and that. She told me - she wasn't playing speaks with her father or something. As a matter of fact we were on Strathfield Station, I was taking her out somewhere, her father was a guard on the trains. And we had to change trains, and the train pulled out and it wasn't our train. And I didn't take any notice, and she said, 'my father was the guard on that train'. (laughs). 'And he looked at me too' she said.

Q: And he didn't speak to you?

Well he didn't have time to speak, he was the guard on the train that was going out. We were on the other end of the platform, and she just saw him as it went past.

Q: So your mother put on the reception?

Yes, she put on the reception.

Q: Now I thought we might go back a little bit to the depression. We didn't mention a lot about that life. I was wondering about the sorts of things you saw around the area - the Ryde area during those years. Whether you saw a lot of obvious poverty, evictions or dole queues, or whether these things weren't so obvious in the area at the time.

Well of course when you're in business you can't get about that much. But I have seen a dole queue and I know there were a lot of people out of work. The Vincent de Paul Society brought the dole in. There were a lot of people on the dole and we had dole coupons. In the shop they'd bring their coupons to you and you'd allow them so much expense on meat.

Q: Tell me exactly how that system worked Joe.

Well if I can remember. Well they'd bring in the ticket.

Q: Did you call them tickets or coupons. Or did they call them either?

Either. They were entitled to so much meat according to the size of the family. Well they wouldn't get it in all in one go sometimes and then they'd use some meat and when they'd used all the value of the coupon well that was finished of course.

Q: And where would they have collected the coupon or tickets from?

I think they had to go for them up to Ryde. From the School of Arts. I'm not sure about that now.

Q: At some period they went to the Police Station, but that wasn't the case in every place of course.

I'm not sure exactly how they got the coupons. But we had to post them and they'd send a cheque in from the Government.

Q: Oh right so you'd get your coupons, send them in and you'd be reimbursed from the Government?

Yeah, that's right.

Q: Did you ever have any problem with that system or was it a smooth operation?

Oh very little trouble. Very little. There was perhaps a few little hiccoughs now and then, but nothing serious as far as I was concerned.

Q: Can you visualise some of the people that came in with those tickets? What sort of people they were? What their attitude perhaps was? Their demeanour? Did they look very depressed?

No - well I didn't notice that much. Of course they were unhappy about it.

Q: You mentioned before the St Vincent de Paul Society. Were you a member?

Yes I was. I was an active member of the Hibernian Society. I wasn't really active in the St Vincent de Paul Society, only in later years.

Q: Could you explain for the record the sort of work that the St Vincent de Paul Society would have been doing during those depression years?

Yes well you visited people. People who were out of work and that and give em a coupon for five shillings worth of groceries, in those days. (laughs). You walked around, you didn't have a car in those days. We used to meet at St Charles after 10 o'clock Mass, about 11 o'clock we'd meet until about twelve. Then in the afternoon we might go and visit the cancer home or the Home for

Incurables. Or we visited some people who were out of work down in Putney or something like that. You'd walk all the way.

Q: Was it only Catholic families you visited?

Oh no not necessarily. No there was no discrimination in religion with the St Vincent de Paul Society, no matter what religion they were you helped them. Oh yes.

Q: And you mentioned the Hibernian Society several times. Perhaps you could explain. It was like a Friendly Society, like the Manchester Unity. People joined it primarily for the health benefits that it gave? Was that the main purpose?

That was the main purpose. You see there was no such thing as sick pay. Well in the Hibernian Society you were paid a guinea a week if you were sick. And if the sickness went on, after about twelve months you were reduced to about half, and then a quarter of that. All the Friendly Societies were the same in that respect. [tape break]

They had a branch in Ryde so I joined there.

Q: So when did the Hibernian Society begin? Do you remember that?

No I don't it was going before I joined it. I think it was about the turn of the century I would have thought.

Q: And the branch in Ryde?

The branch in Ryde, yeah. People from Gladesville, the secretary actually lived in Gladesville.

Q: Had that been operating for some time when you joined?

Oh yes, it had been.

Q: So you would have joined in the 1930s?

When I turned 16 I joined.

Q: Tell me exactly what benefits you got from the Hibernian Society.

Well getting a guinea when you were sick, that was the main benefit. That's right, you could visit the doctor too, you didn't have to pay for the doctor. All the societies paid into - you nominated your doctor and they paid the doctor every quarter. I think it was nine shillings they paid the doctor for each member they had. And they paid that every quarter whether you visited him or not. The doctor still got that.

Q: Now were there specific doctors that they dealt with or could you go to any doctor at all?

I think nearly all doctors accepted the Society. Some may not have. Specialists for instance. But most of the family doctors, you know the G.Ps they were connected with all the Societies like this you see. Every Society paid the same thing like the Providence and Alliance and the Manchester Unity, the Grand United Order all those others, were all in on the same footing.

Q: Were there only Catholics in the Hibernian Society?

Yes.

Q: Did it have a direct connection with the church or was it just that it was a Catholic organisation? Catholic people in it.

Just Catholic people in it. It was sort of connected to the church. We used to do things for the church too like as I told you we dug trenches for the orphans and things like that. We used to meet on the church property always in the parish hall, or in a classroom or something.

Q: The parish priest, would he have any input?

Yes, well the parish priest is a bit of a dictator you know. He's got a lot of say and you sort of had to do as he says. He might attend a meeting very occasionally. But we were mostly left to our own devices, but if you wanted to do anything for the parish you had to approach the parish priest to get his permission to do it.

Q: How long did you remain in that? Were you in it in later years, after your marriage?

Yes yes, in later years. But of course, see the Friendly Societies have nearly disappeared now you see, the Government help, you know, the sick pay and dole and that sort of thing. I've still got an Insurance Policy which I only pay annually. My people left will collect the money from the Insurance. It’s a life policy you know.

Q: Did the Friendly Societies have a dispensary in Ryde?

Yes they did. I don't think they've got it any more though. They've sold it. It’s still there. One was in the middle of the main shopping centre there. It was all the Friendly Societies between them got it going you know.

Q: Was that on Blaxland Rd?

Yes.

Q: And the chemist is still operating but not as a Friendly Society dispensary?

Yeah. As a matter of fact, it is only just recently they wound up the Ryde United Friendly Society's pharmacy. They've just wound up. I didn't take shares in it originally. I was scrounging to get married at the time and I thought I might need the money. My brother-in-law who lives in Ryde, he had shares in it and I think his wife had shares and my other sister that died just before Christmas, she had shares in it too. And then I bought shares in later years. The best investment I ever made as a matter of fact. (laughs). The local branch of the Hibernian Society used to fund a Christmas tree every year and of course that's gone out of fashion and we had this Christmas tree account which was nothing to do with head office. The Christmas tree fund had shares in the pharmacy, so they decided seeing we don't run a Christmas tree any more they'd have a meeting and let the members buy the shares. So I attended the meeting. We weren't having regular meetings at this time. So I decided to buy my share in those. Old Jim Murphy and they were sold for a small price, some of them thought they should have been sold for more. The money we got for selling the shares we donated to charities when it was all settled up.

Q: And this would have been after you came to live out here?

Yes, after I come out here. So I went to the meeting and I decided to buy what shares were going, and those that wanted them, and we just split up what - I had one share in the parent company and 27 shares in the holding company I think. And they just wound up. I got a good little bonus out of that. (laughs).

Q: Now Joe could I ask about moving out here to Balaclava Rd. Why you chose this area, and perhaps you could tell me a little bit about what the area looked like when you first came here in 1957?

Yes well when I sold the business I made enquiries as to whether it was easy to buy a property and they told me it was. So I sold the business, quicker than I expected and I had a month to get out of the residence.

Q: You felt you just wanted a change?

Yes, well my wife was fed up and so was I a bit you know.

Q: Too much hard work?

Too much hard work you know and a battle all the time. It’s not all its cracked up to be, being your own boss and I didn't have much passing trade then either. At any rate the wife had had enough, and this chap specialised in selling butcher's shops. He called in to see if I wanted to sell the business. We found as well the bloke working for us had his hand in the bag and that made us a bit disgusted. I said, 'Righto' you can put it on the market. I got a shock, he sold it quickly. (laughs). And of course we had a month to get out of the

house at any rate. But I couldn't get a house in a month and my eldest daughter at this time owned a horse too, we had to get a place where she could keep a horse. So the Estate Agent gave us a few properties to look at a few and we couldn't get interested in Rydalmere and places like that, then we got into this place here and we thought we could keep a horse here so we got in here. But in the meantime fortunately my sister and her husband who lived in Cressy Rd they owned a caravan. My wife, myself and my youngest daughter lived in the caravan, one of my daughters lived with my wife's sister who lived out at Petersham, and one of the other daughters lived with my mother. (laughs).

Q: How long did that go on for?

Oh not that long. A month or two.

Q: So the girls would have had to go to different schools.

Oh well two of the eldest girls were working then. The youngest one only started school in Ryde and the second youngest she was in fifth class in Ryde and we moved out here in December I think, so the following year she took a bus over to Ryde to sixth class to save changing schools before she went to high school. And the youngest one went up here to St Anthony's because she'd only done one year at St Charles. And the other one went over to Ryde for a year to do sixth class and then she went to Monte St Angelo. They wanted to go there, I thought they should go to Epping which was closer. But the wife and the girls wanted to go to Monte St Angelo and so they won the battle. That's in North Sydney.

Q: Was that more up market than Epping?

Probably I don't know, they were both Sisters of Mercy, but the Monte St Angelo, were the English Sisters of Mercy, and in Epping it was the Irish Sisters of Mercy.

Q: Now going back to your business, you sold it in 1957, were you using the horse and cart until then for deliveries?

Yes.

Q: You never changed your mode of transport? So when you said your daughter had a horse she would have been able to stable it there in Victoria Rd?

Yes and I had a horse drop on me you know. When I was in the shop the chap working for me - I'd do a delivery one day a month, something like this to keep in touch with the customers and leave him the shop and the other days he'd do it. We only delivered three days a week then. Things have changed, six days a week was the slavery days. He generally got the horse ready he'd come out to open and shut the gate. Generally I drove the car down and he'd shut the gates behind me. I got out and pulled up in front of the shop. There

was some oil on the road from a bus or something, and at any rate the horse went down and I thought he had slipped on the oil, but he didn't he had a heart attack apparently. There was a policeman waiting for a tram or a bus and he held the horse's head and I unharnessed and pulled the cart off and by the time I got the cart off him he was dead. Frank Carey a great friend of mine, he came down and saw the horse there and he arranged for the Council (it was on Victoria Rd you see) and he arranged for the Council truck to come down and tow the body round the corner into Pott St. I rang up a bloke to come and take the carcass away, and he came the same day, but not till the afternoon. He towed the carcass round the corner. And an old Scotsman used to come into my shop there he used to have horses, he used to come up to my shop every Friday for meat, and the funny thing, the farriers put a new set of shoes on the horse the night before, and he let him go down the yard and he said, 'I've never seen that horse looking better'. This was the night before. Now the Scotsman come up and he said, 'Is that your horse lying over there?' and I said, 'Yes Jock'. And he said, 'It's a funny thing, but they always die with a new set of shoes on them'. (laughter).

END OF INTERVIEW