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An Interview with Norman Timbrell

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When as kids we used to go out to Ryde, sometimes we'd go bird nesting out on the hill behind Field of Mars Cemetery where the council ran a sewerage depot and where for some reason or other there was always a lot of bird nests. We went bird nesting. Quite illegal and quite destructive but as kids we didn't think anything of it.

Q: Was it illegal then?

I don't know.

Q: No one showed disapproval?

No, no. 'Oh you ought see so and so's collection of bird eggs.' You'd get the eggs, you'd pierce a hole in each end and you'd blow them and then you'd put em in a box. Well I only had a few eggs in a box but every time I moved the box I'd break the eggs. (Laughs).

Q: Do you remember what sort of birds?

Oh, budgerigars and native birds. I just remember the budgerigars.

Q: And where you're talking about now this is what is now Dress Circle Estate?

Yes, that's right, and that was good.

Q: That must have been a pretty smelly place to go bird nesting?

Yes - but you didn't notice it. I know when you got near it you could smell it but that didn't worry us. We'd climb - but it wasn't necessarily in the sewerage farm itself, it might have been in the bush opposite, you see?

Q: Yes, but can you remember the smell though?

I can remember noticing it, yes. I can remember noticing it, but it wasn't it - it wasn't depressing or anything like that. (Laughs). That was the smell of the sewerage farm and that was it.

Q: How did you get from Tarban Creek to -

- Well Tarban Creek, that's at Hunters Hill there -

Q: Yes, how did you get there, walk?

Oh yes we walked, we walked along - came up to Church Street, Gladesville Road, Ryde Road as far as Pittwater Road. Then along Pittwater Road. Oh we might go along Ryde Road and down to Buffalo Road and up Cressy Road. It was a long walk. That was the only way we went, by walking.

Q: And as you walked along that, can you just picture for me perhaps what you would see perhaps going along Pittwater Road or Cressy Road? Can you picture the scene, what it would be like?

As I said the Ryde Road is not much different from what it is to day.

Q: The number of houses you mean?

That's right. A couple of houses have been pulled down and a few blocks of flats built but apart from that they were the same. Sometimes a new house has been put when an old one fell down or something like that but mostly it was about the same density along Ryde Road. Then we'd walk along Ryde Road past Pittwater Road and then down to Ryde. Along there, there were a couple of disused brick pits. Now Monash Park and Westminster Park.

Q: So hang on - so there was a brick pit where Monash Park is now?

That's right. And where Westminster Park is. The natural height of the ground must have been about 6 or 8 feet higher than it is now because there was a fence along the top of the ground and then where they got into it they'd chopped away to bring it down to the level of Ryde Road and then the pit went down behind that. I can remember one time we were out there and the police - the salvage, lord knows what was there and they were pulling a car out of what was then the abandoned brick pit which was full of water and the car had been apparently stolen and dumped there. I can remember that as well as anything, people pulling it up. Because later on they filled what was the brick pit where Monash Park is now and they filled in a lot of the brick pit where Westminster Park is. We'd walk along there, we'd go down what is now Monash Road, but then was called Victoria - I don't know whether it was Victoria Road or Victoria Street, but we'd walk down there to Higginbottom Road and we'd walk along Higginbottom Road.

My memories of Higginbottom Road - I can remember during the depression years I can remember a chap built himself - we watched him build himself a home down there out of salvaged material. I don't know where he got it from but it was - the whole house was built from secondhand material. I think he just had to go to the tip - but he wanted a roof over his head so he did it.

Q: He would have been unemployed I suppose?

Oh yes, didn't have any money or anything.

Q: Was he squatting or was it his block of land? Have you got any idea?

I believe it would have been his own block of land. He had a block of land and when he was out of work the first thing to do - put a bit of a shed on it and live in it, save rent. I can also remember Cressy Road was a very steep road going up from Buffalo Creek to the top, there was an old rickety old bridge there and during the depression years relief work was brought in then and one of the projects was they built that stone bridge that is there now. At one stage they had to replace the concrete arch or something because it was crook. They had a little light railway where you push hand trucks along and it used to run up the side of Buffalo Creek where they'd get stone and chop stone and wheel it down to where the bridge was being built. Also -

Q: You remember seeing that? You were aware even then that it was depression relief work?

Oh yes we knew what it was. The source of jokes in those days was relief work. The old story about - oh they'd found a bloke, he'd died leaning against a tree. But didn't anyone notice? Oh they thought he was a relief worker. (Laughs) That sort of thing.

Q: Cruel jokes? (Laughs)

Yeah, but that was it. They got a lot of stone out of what is Cressy Road because now they've blocked - - - - Road so that the funeral can go up there, so they dug a lot of stone out of what is now Cressy Road, they made a sort of a quarry in Cressy Road. That's up that way anyway. Now also behind Holy Cross College there used to be Chinese market gardens. I can remember quite well seeing the Chinese working in their gardens and they did everything the hard way. Everything was done by hand, even to watering the plants. They used to have a yoke across their neck and two watering cans on the end of the yoke, to such an extent that they could hold the handles of the watering can and just tip a little bit of water on each plant. They'd walk down between the rows of vegetables or whatever they were growing and they'd tip a little bit of water on to each. They didn't waste a thing.

Q: That's interesting that would be about the 1930s you're talking about I suppose?

That would be the early '30s, yes. There was also a Chinese market garden in Drummoyne just to the left of Victoria Road that is now being built out by flats and the like and there was a bowling club there behind the Caltex station at the foot of Victoria Road and there was a Chinese market garden there. A lot of Chinese market gardens out there.

Q: The ones in Holy Cross College. Have you got any - can you visualise when they went?

No I haven't got anything to apply it to. I just don't know when - just suddenly you realised, oh they haven't got the market garden there.

Q: Do you remember huts or shacks where they used to live there?

No I can't remember those although I've been told that there were some there but I don't have any recollection of that myself. I do know that in Buffalo Road my mother's aunt had a dairy there, Swain's dairy and they used to milk the cows and then they'd let the cows out the gate and the cows would go up to paddocks off Cressy Road just on the other side of Cressy Road from Holy Cross College, there were all paddocks up around there and the cows would wander up there themselves and they'd come back when it was time for milking.

Q: Just wander along the road without anyone hurting them?

Well there was no traffic. There was a dirt road just stones that had been built up. There was no surface on it, that you could call a surface.

Q: Now this is a commercial dairy?

Oh yes. They had - one of the sons drove the milk cart around and the daughter used to help with the milking, it was a family affair they just all got stuck into it.

Q: So they didn't need to employ outside people?

No they didn't employ outside people. They just made a living, that was all. They only had one cart but I can remember at the time my mother's aunt said that was called number 3. And they said if you have a 2 they'd expect to see other carts around with a name on them. But if you've got - everything was number 1 - and they'd say, oh you've only got one cart. So putting number 3 implied you had at least 2 other carts but not too many to stir up people looking for them. (Laughs)

Q: (Laughs) Did they really do that? Or are you just making that up?

No, that's true, I'm telling you. That's what they did and it was a logical thing to do. So you'd make out you were bigger than you really are but not too big or you'd trap yourself.

Q: Did you ever go and help with the dairy?

Oh no, no. We used to go over there on Sundays sometimes he'd take a couple of potato bags over and we'd get the 'cow yard confetti' as he called it, just to scoop up and bring it home and put it on the garden, see? They were quite glad to get rid of it. Didn't worry them.

Another one of my mother's aunts lived down in Henry Street which was down behind St. Charles church, down the bottom of the gully there. They built there in 1929, they were very lucky, the aunt and the husband he was employed by Sugar Cartage Ltd., he used to drive horse lorries delivering sugar. He was retrenched during the depression. They just retrenched him. They were very fortunate in that they had - the aunt had saved up and they'd built a house, paid for the house and six months after they had finished, built the house and moved in, he got out of work. He was very lucky because she didn't have to sell the house they could get the dole without having to sell the house. Because if you had any money, you had to spend your money before you got the dole. But they didn't make you sell your house. So they were very lucky in that respect.

Q: What was their name Norm?

That was Mr and Mrs Kell. His name was Clarence George but we called him Jo. And Evelyn Kell, that was my mother's aunt. And Evelyn Kell and Stella Swain were sisters. Swain's had the dairy.

Q: Going back to your aunt for a moment, the one whose husband lost his job in the depression, but they had the house. They had to cut the gas off?

Oh yes they got the gas cut off because they just couldn't afford it. They didn't have the electricity cut off because they needed the light, but the whole house - they had little 15 watt lamps through the place to keep the cost down and the uncle, he was a very handy bloke in that he got hold of a fuel stove from somewhere and he built in a fuel pipe and a fuel stove in a little shed out the back and they actually cooked out in the yard. And of course he could go down to the bush and they used to chop their own wood, they never bought wood. (Laughs)

Q: Do you remember him being idle or very busy during the unemployment period?

Oh he was never idle he was always doing something like chopping wood or going out and getting - he had a go at all these things - all these things that these chaps did during the depression, he had a go at it.

Q: He would have got relief work I suppose?

Oh later on that came, but in the start of the depression of course there was no dole even. And they used to do all sorts of things. They used to sell clothes props. You could hear them going out, 'clothes props - clothes props' and he used to go out - and they'd go out into the bush at North Ryde, there was plenty of bush there and they'd chop down saplings and make clothes props, you know like about say, a ten foot long -

Q: - probably without a timber licence?

Oh I would say without a timber licence. (Laughs) Oh no, that was expenditure, you snuck out (laughs) no timber licence. And they'd take em round and sell em. I can remember seeing fellas coming around carrying them on their shoulder. Six or eight clothes props, they'd charge a shilling each for them or something like that. But it was a shilling. But anyway this uncle of mine - his sister-in-law that's the one who had the dairy they had a bought a horse for their dairy but the bloke that sold them the horse, the thing was too small, the horse just was a pony and it couldn't pull the milk cart - well not keep up the speed that they needed to keep up.

Q: What happened to the pony?

Well anyway before he got out of work he - he had the pony for quite a while. Before he got out of work he had a sulky and he and my aunt used to around in this sulky with the horse. They'd go all over the place, go down to Manly and places like that. But when he got out of work, my father financed him to buy some materials, just sawn timber and a few bits of iron work and he built a wagon - a dray, it was very light and he even used the sulky wheels and he made a galvanised iron tank and he used to around selling rabbits. He'd go into the city, I don't know where they were, and he'd buy the rabbits and then he'd go around and he built up a bit of a run selling rabbits but then of course all the other blokes got into selling rabbits (laughs) and the bottom dropped out of the business.

Q: What was the galvanised iron tank for?

Oh that was to keep the rabbits - there was a tank and a carrying piece inside where you put a couple of blocks of ice and then the rabbits would go in there - just to keep them cool on the hot days.

Q: The tank had a section for the ice?

A section for the ice and they used to buy the rabbits, and if you wanted a rabbit he'd skin it there and then for you. And he kept the skins and when he got home he'd spread the skins out on the fence and dry them and sell the skins.

Q: He didn't go rabbiting himself? There wasn't enough?

Oh no, no. There was no rabbiting around - oh you might see an occasional rabbit, but don't think in those days the rabbit would last long, it was dinner on the hoof sort of thing. (Laughs) If you caught a rabbit you didn't let him go, see?

Q: And rabbit was regarded as a nice feed?

In my opinion rabbit still is a legitimate meal. A baked rabbit, and incidentally that was one of the funny stories about this aunt of mine who had the dairy.

Q: The Swain's?

That's it. And when they were first married, Stella bought a rabbit, see - and baked it and uncle came home from work wherever it was and he said, 'By gee that was a bonza meal - that was a bonza meal that'. So the next night he got baked rabbit and baked rabbit and baked rabbit (Laughs) till he started to burrow. (Laughs). But that's just an incidental thing which people do.

Jo had this cart see -

Q: This is your unemployed uncle?

Yes he was unemployed and he was looking around and a lot of people at that time used to go what they call 'on the wallaby', they'd hump their bluey through the bush looking for work. So he decided to go bush, look for work. And with the chap that lived opposite who was also out of work, Bertie - I don't know what his other name was I'll think of it later. Bert Hall - Bert Hall used to go with him, and he went with him and they went up the north coast, but they were the flashest swagmen on the road, they had a horse and cart. And to get across the Hawkesbury River, they got up there, there was a punt only then and you had to pay a toll on the punt. But before six o'clock in the morning or before five o'clock you could travel free. So they had to camp on the side of the river at -

Q: Wiseman's ferry?

For the ----- ferry - they'd camp on the side of the river so you could get up early for the first punt across in the morning, which was a free ride. That's how they got to the Hawkesbury (Laughs). They took quite a while. They got up as far as they got, I think as far as Wauchope. But the further they went the

scarcer the jobs got and the more that was on the road. They realised that there was just no - they weren't going to do it - they nearly lost the horse up there. The horse got something wrong with it and Jo said, he said to the woman - he wanted to give it something to - the woman said 'I've only got an old bottle with Worcestershire sauce'. He said, 'Give me that'. So he put a bit of hot water in with the Worcestershire sauce and threw it down the horse's throat and cured the horse (Laughs).

Q: (Laughs) You just made that one up.

No - true.

Q: And they would have been camping I suppose?

Oh yes, there were no motels then. (Laughs) Oh of course they'd camp on the side - they'd just have their swags and they'd roll their swags out.

Q: Your uncle, what job was he in before? Before he got out of work?

He was always a labourer. The one immediately prior to getting out of work was he used to drive horse lorries for sugar cartage to Pyrmont.

Q: Oh sorry, yes you said that.

And as a matter of fact - sometimes he'd do a run down Hunters Hill, there was a big store just near Woolwich dock called McClune's or some name like that. And he used to sometimes take a load of sugar down there. Now if he was taking a load of sugar down there he came in to - we lived in Morefield Avenue, but Herbert Avenue was the best way to get in. So he'd leave his horses at the top of the hill, he'd come down and get me and I'd go down to Woolwich with him on the top of this - and I was the proudest kid on Hunters Hill because I sat on top of a lorry load of sugar and I waved to everybody I knew. I did, I really thought it was great and all the kids looked up, 'Look at Timbrell up there, how did he get a ride on that?' (Laughs) It was - it was - quite a thrill to go down on the horse wagon down to - and then of course when he was coming back he'd let me off.

Q: Norm because there was so many people around unemployed around in the depression, not just your uncle, in your household where your father had a job, what was the attitude generally to the unemployed. I mean you mentioned the relief worker jokes, but generally can you remember what the attitude was?

Oh yes, the whole family, my mother and my father - of course he had a - his sister's husband was out of work - and quite a lot of relatives out of work and all they did - well we really felt sorry for the ones out of work - no looking down on them or anything like that, they were unfortunate. He helped this uncle Jo, he helped him get the timber to make the cart and he had his sister that lived in Balmain, he used to help them with food and stuff like that. You know? Because you had to get in and do it.

My father was very fortunate he worked for the railways, he was a clerk in the railways and they started to get rationed with work and what they did they gave him one week off in five or one week off in seven - whatever the number was and a lot of the blokes didn't get paid for that work see? So anyway he said he'd take it off, 'We can manage for a week'. So he did what they call rationed work, he was rostered off for a week with no pay. But the union went to court to the industrial commission and argued that these men were salaried officers, they were paid a yearly salary and the yearly salary had to be paid whether they used them or not. So all the blokes that had had a week off (laughs) rationed, got paid for that week. He was one of the lucky ones cause he went off the first week. He didn't make a fuss - you see a lot of them made a fuss about it. I think he got two weeks pay because he got rationed for two weeks. (Laughs). But the union fought it and won it. They said, 'No, they're salaried officers'. Unfortunately in the railways and the tramways there was the wages staff and salaried staff. And the wages staff were paid by the hour upward a day where the salaried staff were paid by the year. Those of course who were paid by the day or by the hour they weren't guaranteed a yearly salary. They lost it.

Q: Was your family a strong Labour or union oriented family?

No, no, not really. My father in his young days, he was pro Labour but during the war when Labour voted out conscription. He believed in conscription you see he was a very ardent believer in conscription. Although he was a volunteer himself he still thought conscription was correct, so he switched away from Labour then because they wouldn't have conscription on. And he was a very pro UAP - United Australia Party. But my mother to her dying day was always a very stern, very strict Labour person. So much so that when the 1917 strike was on - of course my father was away at the war - she said the trams will be running down they will be driven by what they call 'scabs'. And as the tram went past she'd hold her nose. Just hold her nose to let them see they didn't like them. But she did that. And the bloke then tapped his foot said, 'Oh right -oh you walk'. She would, she'd rather walk than ride on a tram with a scab.

Q: It must have been interesting in your family in Jack Lang's days, especially when Jack Lang was dismissed.

Oh yes, well my father was very anti-Lang. I was too I suppose because naturally I got his - you inherit your politics you know.

Getting back to Ryde, I told you about those old brick pits. There was two brick pits, one at the end of College Street was closed - well when I say recently I mean say comparatively recently, well and truly after the war it was still going. But the one on the other side of Tennyson Road behind that Gladesville park whatever they call it now. That one was closed down during the depression and never got going again. At one stage they were going to work the pit by digging a tunnel under Victoria Road, they were going to dig a tunnel from the College Street - you know the pit I'm referring to - they were

going to dig a tunnel under Victoria Road to that pit that was off Tennyson Road because there was still a lot of workable clay there.

Q: The Tennyson Road one, is that the one you can still see as you drive past?

Well Tennyson Road runs off Victoria Road. Now as you're coming along Victoria Road on the left there's this big industrial building quite modern, then Tennyson Road, you go down Tennyson Road and a bit on the left there was a bit of a pit in there. I don't know what they've done with it now - I haven't seen it for years.

Q: Yes, well I just wondered what was there now.

Well the - at one stage the old brick Kiln was converted to use as a factory and they were making shoe machinery, shoe making machinery. But later on they - the Department of Labour and Industry closed it down because they weren't properly ventilated or anything else like that. They weren't designed as a factory they were designed as a brick kiln. And it just didn't work. Down the bottom there was Peel's dairy just alongside that and then down - Grieve's had his dairy in the Ryde Municipality - no it wasn't it was in the Hunters Hill Municipality because he was in Bateman's Road, but they did all round this area.

(continuing on from an anecdote about his father) This would have been about 1930. You see the depression wouldn't have started. And they weren't going to chuck their jobs for anything. Because that was before the bridge was built. But anyway at that time too there was a tram that ran from Ryde to Ryde station, they call it West Ryde now but I always knew it as Ryde station. Ryde to Ryde Station was the tram line and the tram came down Church Street and it stopped outside the old Post Office and then went back again and stopped at Rydedale Road.

Q: And do you remember getting the tram yourself?

Oh I've been on that tram many, many times.

Q: Did you ever get sick on them? People have told me they used to get sick on the trams.

Oh no I loved them. Oh no you wouldn't get sick on something you loved. I love trams I still do today. When we go to Melbourne I spend a couple of days at a time riding round on the trams.

Q: What did you like about trams?

I don't know, I don't know. It's the same love of trains. I think it's the fact they've got a track and they follow that track. I don't know I'm a real train buff. You should see some of the books I've got on trains. So I'm a train buff and a tram buff.

We never had any picture shows at Hunters Hill so always had to go somewhere else to the pictures and it was nothing for us to go as far as Balmain, Chatswood, Lindfield, Ryde, Lane Cove, Gladesville, Drummoyne, Five Dock we always had to get in the car and go somewhere. But as a kid I used to like to go Saturday afternoon to the pictures, you see. A serial - 'The Indians are coming', or something like that. Everybody went to Gladesville but I used to hate Gladesville because they just let the kids run riot and you could not hear the dialogue on the picture.

Q: And you wanted to follow it?

I went to the pictures I didn't go to hear kids running around and that sort of thing. So I used to go out to Ryde.

Q: Now was this when you were a kid Norm?

Oh yes.

Q: And would they have serials, following on and you wanted to keep up with all what was happening?

Oh yeah - well any picture show you went to they had episode one, two, three and generally about 12 or 13 episodes to the series you see? One of them was called 'The Indians are coming' I remember that as well as anything.

Q: Which picture theatre at Gladesville are you talking about?

The Palace.

Q: That's not the one where that furniture shop is now?

No actually the first theatre in Gladesville was on the corner of Meriton Street and Wharf Road, but I didn't go to the pictures when that was on. The other one was the Palace Theatre in Jordan Street and the Victory that was owned by Gus Bowe up near the timber yard. Now Gus Bowe always had better programmes and the like and when I was a little kid we used to go up there. But when the talkies came in, for some reason or other the Victory Theatre wasn't suitable for talkies. I suppose the resonance might be wrong or the acoustics were just wrong. So they didn't convert it to talkies and they put in the talkies in the Palace in Jordan Street. Then of course the Victory closed down. They used to let it out for concerts and things like that. And then Gus Bowe. He was the theatrical entrepreneur - or what are they called? Exhibitors? He lived in Gladesville, I think he was in Ashburn Place and he built the theatre at Ryde where Westfield is now.

Q: Top Ryde shopping centre?

That's right it was just opposite – Hatton’s Flat was there.

Q: Where the car park is?

Yeah about where the car park is.

Q: The Rialto?

That's it the Rialto. Well you know it (Laughs). But it was a good theatre, I liked it and Gus Bowe stood no shenanigans from the kids, he was a lovely bloke and the kids loved him but there was no mucking about, if you mucked about you were out.

Q: Would he go and personally get them out?

He'd take them out himself. Get them by the ear and pull them out sort of thing.

Q: So you didn't muck up at the Rialto.

No you didn't muck up at the Rialto. Of course if it was a comedy you'd laugh - well that didn't matter, that was what you were there for. He was always there himself and he always gave good value. Now as a kid I used to go out there - I'd have to get a bus and a tram. I'd get a bus from up here at Figtree to Gladesville then go across the road and get the tram to Top Ryde. And coming back reversed the process.

Q: You'd say Hatton's Flat, you wouldn't say you were going to Top Ryde?

It did - it was known as Top Ryde, only to distinguish it from West Ryde. But it was always on the trams it just said Ryde, it didn't say Top Ryde shops or anything like that, it just said Ryde, that was Ryde. There was Ryde station and Ryde. I used to go out there to the pictures because I knew you could appreciate the film.

Q: Did you go with friends?

No I used to go on my own.

Q: Did you?

The other kids would go to Gladesville I wouldn't be bothered.

Q: Muck up?

I just couldn't stand it. To me it was putting sixpence down the drain. (Laughs).

Q: How old would you have been then Norm when you were doing this by yourself?

Nine or ten.

Q: You'd sit up at the pictures by yourself?

Yeah. You'd get a packet of licorice cigarettes and something like that (Laughs). Oh yes I didn't mind going on my own, I used to go lots of places like that.

Q: Did the seat prices vary where you were sitting or were they all the one price?

I think they were all the one price. For the matinee anyway. At the Palace theatre - I'm talking now about the adult prices at night, because we only had to pay sixpence wherever I went I can't remember any other price. Sixpence. At Gladesville the front stalls were a shilling and the back stalls were 1/3d or 1/6d and the dress circle was 1/9d or two shillings, that's how they went up. And of course children, Saturday night there was no half fares. Full price Saturday night. Week nights half price, that would be say sixpence. Saturday night was a big deal in those days. And ninepence upstairs or something like that. But that was all there was. Gus Bowe's at Ryde, he had two or three levels he had, the front stalls down there the back stalls there and the dress circle in the middle and they had three prices; one shilling, 1/6d - two shillings, something like that. But Gus was - he was always well liked but he always gave good value and I can remember going to the pictures - this was a night time show - of course I went with the family then and they started about half past seven. There were three feature films, about three shorts, what they called a Gazette which was a newsreel.

Q: Gazette?

A Gazette, they called it a Gazette - a news reel.

Q: Yes, I've heard it called a Gazette.

Well they did. Well my father was called the Gazette (Laughs).

(Outsider) It wouldn't be news as such they'd be little features all in together.

And then there'd be a short like 'Laurel and Hardy' or someone like that. But this particular night I remember well. There were three feature films. I don't know why but there was only one interval but after the third feature film they put on a short at the end and the thing came out about half past twelve. (Laughs) Everybody said, 'Oh that was good, Gus Bowe gave good value'.

When he had his Rialto theatre, this was during the depression years, he used to have parcels of groceries and he'd get up on the stage and the spot light

would come from the projection box and he'd have a mirror and he'd flash this mirror around and he'd shine it on a kid and whoever he shone it one he'd give them a parcel of groceries. And I think he just used his nous, - this kid looks as though he - I think that's what he did. I think he'd say, 'I think this kid could do with a - looks like they could do with a bundle of groceries'. And the kid would win the bundle of groceries. And there'd be about five or six packs of groceries that would go off each week and of course the kid who won them thought he was Xmas.

Q: Did you ever win them?

No I never won them because I think - I had shoes on.

Q: And that would be a good indicator.

Good indication, yeah. Oh when I went to school I can remember during the depression years going to school, I was fortunate my father had a decent job and we had shoes you see, but there were quite a few kids at school that didn't have shoes. Also I can remember quite well - there was not much money around - but one kid used to take a little pudding basin of cold porridge and he had a packet of salt and he sprinkled the salt over the cold porridge and he'd eat that for his lunch. Well there was a good thing about it; one it was very nourishing, it was a very good food, porridge. And two it was filling. Now what more could you want?

Q: Stick to his ribs as they say.

That's right. And that's what he used to have - well not every day, but frequently.

Q: Did you ever go to school without shoes from choice or take them off as soon as you could get a chance.

No I wore shoes to and from school. But I used to like wet days because my mother would let me go without shoes on wet days, she reckoned it was better to have just wet feet and get to school and they'd dry then to sit around in wet shoes all day. Only for that reason she'd allow me to go without shoes if it was raining.

(Outsider) In Gladesville they used to walk in the middle of the road.

Oh - you know Ryde Road?

Q: Yes.

I went to school in Mark Street. The Marist Brothers. We would look along Ryde Road towards Hunters Hill you see, now it was a concrete road then, but it had only just been laid and we used to kick a stone or a tin down the middle of the road. There was no traffic.

Q: No danger getting run over?

No danger of getting run over. You couldn't kick a stone across the road today.

(Outsider voice) Before Tarban Creek bridge went in that was the main way to Hunters Hill you went down Gladesville road towards - - - - - Street.

Q: When you say it had recently been concreted would that have been a depression project or? -

No that was Hunters Hill council. Hunters Hill council built that concrete road.

Q: You don't mean bitumen. You mean concrete?

Oh yes concrete. They built it - it ran from Gladesville along Woolwich Road as far as Wybeleena Road.

Q: What part of Gladesville do you mean?

It came from Victoria Road, down Pittwater Road, to Ryde Road and then it came along Ryde Road past Boronia Park to Gladesville road and then of course the main roads department put in a concrete road there, I don't know which one went in first. And then from Jolibert Street - followed Church Street, Alexander Street and that, along Woolwich Road to Wybeleena Road and that's where it finished and that concrete road was put in and I think it cost them something like thirty thousand pounds.

Also now up at North Ryde all round the harbour were picnic grounds because that was the only way you could get away like for picnics, the best place was the harbour because the ferries could go all around. This high school down there - that was called the Avenue Pleasure Grounds, it was owned by Sydney ferries. And you could rent the grounds from Sydney ferries - what you did you rented the grounds and you rented the ferry service to bring your crowd up there, to their picnic.

Further up the Lane Cove river at North Ryde was Fairyland. You'll have plenty of reference to that I'm sure. A bloke named Swan, known as Swanny, he had that.

Q: Do you remember going up there yourself?

Yes.

Q: How did you go up there?

I remember going up there one time by boat. My father and mother and dad's cousin and her husband and four kids went, we hired a boat down here at Figtree. A rowing boat.

Q: No motor?

Oh no, no, no, no. Just uncle Jack and dad did the lot (Laughs). Just rowed up to Fairyland, had a picnic. Also I can remember walking through the bush to Fairyland. The bloke that owned it, Swan. At one stage he put on a big banquet for the transport -

Q: - employees?

No, no (Laughs). No, no. For the heads of the department. Because he was trying to persuade them - there was a lot of talk about a tram line from Ryde to Chatswood and he was out there to boost them to go down through Fullers Bridge, he wanted them to go down his way - which was - what would you call it today? Lobbying. I suppose it was a form of lobbying. Of course I remember too when they built the weir at Fullers Bridge, that was done as a relief work. And a couple of years after the weir was completed, people reckoned that they saw a shark in the river, see, above the weir. Well of course they were letting off explosives and god knows what. But no sharks - no.

Q: So tell me about your day at Fairyland. Can you put a picture in your mind now exactly what you did?

No I cannot remember any more than that I just knew that there were sort of little summer houses - picnic houses, only a roof on a table and two benches. Two benches and a table with a roof over it. And when you we up there if you got one you got one of those. That's all I can remember of Fairyland.

When the talkies came - I can remember the first talking picture I saw, it was not out here it was in the town at the Capitol Theatre my mother took me to see one of the early talkie films, it was called 'In Old Arizona'. It was obviously a western. She just took me because she wanted to go and see talkie films. She wanted to see the talkies. And of course I loved to go. I don't know if my sister was alive then or not. You see my sister's four years younger than me. I can remember being taken, I can remember going to the Capitol theatre because they had a clear sky overhead with stars and they had clouds that went across the ceiling.

Q: We mentioned before the Khartuom Theatre when we were just chatting. Did you say you ever went to that?

No. I knew there was an open air theatre at North Ryde I didn't know where it was, I might have seen it from the outside, but no I never remember going to that one. The only ones I remember going to was the Victory Theatre in Gladesville and later on the Palace. I can remember going to the pictures in what I think later on became the Argyle. That's near the bowling club at Ryde in Blaxland Road. You know the bowling club? Well next it there's an old building that was a picture show at one time. I think it was called the Argyle, I'm not sure but I'm sure I can remember going there with my parents and seeing a film. I don't know what it was, I just remember that area, just coming

out from there. So whether it was the forerunner before Gus Bowe built his Rialto I don't know.

Q: Now what were the other things you noted there Norm you wanted to mention? Your mother used to tell you about the funerals.

My mother used to tell me about the funerals going up Cressy Road and how it was so bumpy the back door of the hearse opened and a coffin fell out.

(Outsider)(I can remember that road being opened when I first came here and now they've just made a park of it just near that little bridge).

Yes that's right I can remember that bridge being built.

Q: What's the name of the street where the bridge is?

(Outsider) (Pitting Road where the intersection there of Pitting and - it's probably still surveyed through as a road).

Yes well it is, it's part of Pitting Road. That's the trouble, Chrissy Road is a straight road it goes up and down and up and down and you can't make use of it because it's in three sections. There's a little bit in front of Field of Mars cemetery and there is a bit more of it the other side.

Q: Thank you Norm, even though you're from Hunters Hill you've been very useful.

Oh thank you. Yes well I can remember a lot of those things. Another thing I can remember about the depression was the number of buskers who used to come around. One chap used to play the cornet. He'd stand up the top of the hill, he take a collection round amongst the houses, and he'd come down to another position and play another tune on the cornet and take his collection around.

Q: He'd go round the houses?

He'd go round the houses after he'd played his cornet. Then he'd go around - contribution to the musician sort of thing.

Q: Did you use the work busker though, in those days?

Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: That was the word you used?

That was a very popular word in those days, actually when I heard them using it in recent years, 'Oh' I thought, 'They've resurrected buskers'. Because my mother told me the story that when she was kid her mother bought her a piano and the piano - she lived in Rozelle - and the piano, they had to pick up the piano from Randwick or somewhere like that.

Q: Bought privately was it?

Oh yes. Oh I'm not too sure on that, but anyway. They had to bring this piano from Kensington. And some friend of the family had a horse and cart so we went out to get the piano and they put the piano - and she's at home waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting and she thought we were never going to turn up, well eventually they did turn up. What it was the horse - it must have been a bit like uncle Jo's horse - it was too small for the job and they had to go miles around just to get a grade that the horse could cope with. And while she's waiting on tenterhooks waiting for the piano to come her grandfather - my great grandfather - he said, 'They've gone busking, that's what they've done, they've gone busking'. (Laughs).

My mother's mother is buried at the Field of Mars cemetery. Quite a few other of our relatives also. She used to go out there every week and tend to her mother's grave, put flowers on it and generally clean up the grass and things like that, now while she was out there, there was a lot of other people doing the same thing with their relatives and of course they'd get together and they'd have a bit of a natter. It was certainly - not just a pilgrimage - it was a bit of a social event to go out to the Mars and talk to all the other people that were doing the same thing.

Q: Do you remember going out with her?

Oh yes, remember it quite well. And then when she got a car - we got a car - she used to drive out there but before that we used to walk.

Q: How long would it take you to walk out there?

Oh dear, I don't know. I didn't have a watch in those days. (Laughs)

Q: Some people out there used to have stalls to sell - people have told me to sell -

- oh there were people out there, people who used to grow flowers and things, grow flowers nearby and sell em outside the cemetery. There was a lot of that. But a lot of the people used to want to water the grass so they had watering cans and you would see chains on the trees chaining the watering can to the tree and of course they always took their key out, undid the chain -

Q: - so they could carry the watering can?

Oh no they all had their own watering can chained to the tree. And fill it up, there were plenty of taps. Water their garden and put water on the flowers and all this sort of stuff and then when they're ready to come home put the watering can up on the tree and chain it up again. Oh yes there were lots of watering cans chained to trees.

(Assistant interviewer) (And in those depression days did many of them put actual headstones on their relatives? They wouldn't have had the money.)

Oh no but you'd be surprised.

(Outsider). (People did have elaborate headstones, even when they were poor).

You would be surprised what people did with regard to funerals. I've been told that one person I know was talking to a funeral director. And she said to him, 'Do you have much bad debt?' 'Oh' he said, 'No we don't have any bad debts. Certainly' he said, 'They take a long time to pay'. But they considered it a debt of honour to their departed relative to pay for the funeral. You must not jack up on paying for the funeral, that had to be done it was a debt of honour and they would think no more of reneging on that than anything.

Q: Thanks Norm. You were going to explain to us about lorry picnics. Alice and I haven't heard of.

Yes in days gone by in the early '30s and late 20s. A very popular form of picnic was a lorry picnic. Generally the people in the street would all get together and they'd hire a lorry from some local carrier and they'd go for a picnic.

(Assistant Interviewer) Was that horse lorries or - ?

No - motor lorries, and they'd go for a picnic to a nearby place. Places which were popular was Windsor and Richmond, Penrith and sometimes down the south coast to Wollongong or some of those sort of places. And I can remember coming back from a picnic - must have been down the south coast on a lorry and we had to get in a queue to get across Tom Ugly's Point. There was only a ferry there then and we got on to the queue - oh it must have been half way up to Sutherland, it was a huge queue and eventually wound our way down to the ferry and there were two or three parallel lines of roads that went across - but not only did they have a punt on these things, but they had one punt on the end of the other one so that they - like it was a double punt because there was so much traffic and it was the only way to get em across. And you'd only have one punt to the pair of wires so they put one in front of the other and they'd take em across that way. I think there were two but there might have been three, I'm not sure, going across that -

(Assistant Interviewer) What do you mean - punts?

Q: On the lorry you sat on seats in the back of the lorry?

That's right, seats in the back of the lorry and you sat up there.

(Assistant Interviewer) Can't have been very stable.

Oh yes they were - there were all sorts of seats some of them had those garden seats.

Q: And they didn't slip and slide around the back of the lorry?

Oh, they didn't seem to be - I don't know.

Q: You must have been quite little when you remember that?

Oh yes because that would have been before my sister was born and she was born in 1927. So it would have been before that.

Q: Yes Tom Ugly's Bridge opened in 1929.

Yes so it would have been before 1927. The year after my sister was born we got our car.

END OF INTERVIEW