CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ALEXANDRIA

Name: Harry Brennan

Date: 27 September 1994

Place: ?

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

TRANSCRIPT

PART 1

0.00 **SR: Interview with Mr Harry Brennan of Alexandria, 27th of September 1994.**

Harry, I understand that you grew up in Alexandria.

HB: Yes.

SR: What year were you born in?

HB: 1949.

SR: What kind of a kid were you?

HB: A model child.

SR: Really?

HB: Yes, we were made to be model children. My father died at a young age and my mother had a lot on her hands with a big family and we were told to do something once and we did it.

SR: How many kids were there in your family?

HB: Well, the living children, there was actually twelve left of the number of children my mother had.

SR: How many did she have?

HB: Sixteen, and there were ten boys and six girls and, of course, things as they were in those days a lot of children died very young and different diseases and different ailments.

SR: What sort of things?

HB: Diphtheria.

SR: Really?

HB: Yes, and of the twelve remaining children, my mother was a disciplinarian because she had to be and she didn't have time to argue the toss about things; she told you to do something and you did it and that was it.

SR: Where were you in the number, what number child were you?

HB: I was the second youngest.

SR: Second youngest. So the older children would have had to do a lot of looking after you?

HB: Yes, yes, they all did their bit and we became self-sufficient because there were certain things that we had to do ourselves. We had to make our beds, we had to polish our shoes for school and we had to make sure that we were clean and she made sure that we did that and we went to school nice and clean. We weren't very studious but we were nice and clean.

2.12 **SR: Had you been born when some of the children died?**

HB: No, two died in the '40s and two died after my younger brother. So the last two and the first two died.

SR: And the first two that died, did they die from diphtheria?

HB: No, the first one died at birth, the second boy died of diphtheria at seven years and I'm not sure but I think the others died at birth as well, the other two.

SR: What are your earliest memories?

HB: We originally came from Botany or Pagewood as East Botany was called then, it was a pretty new area and commission type homes and it was a bit of a shock to move from there to Alexandria to see all the rusty roofs and a hotel on every corner - we'd never seen a hotel. We very rarely went anywhere. My parents were rather poor and my father was in ill-health and we didn't go places so we more or less stayed around the house.

SR: How old were you when you came to Alexandria?

HB: Seven years old.

SR: So that would have been in 1956?

HB: 1956, yes, and my father passed away in 1957.

SR: And what was the matter with him – was it a heart - - -

HB: Yes, he was a bit of a knockabout bloke and he was a big man, a very muscular man but he died from a stroke and he was, I think, forty eight. And, of course, the family was quite young then, my mother was still quite young – I think she was about forty two or something at the time – and she went off to work to help us along.

4.07 **SR: And you were only eight?**

HB: Yes.

SR: And how big was the house that you lived in?

HB: We had a terrace house in Wyndham Street and there were three bedrooms. There were six double-decker beds in the back room upstairs – it was like a dormitory.

SR: So there were, what, twelve kids sleeping in the back room upstairs?

HB: No, the girls slept downstairs in the front room and the boys slept upstairs in the back room.

SR: And six in a room?

HB: Yes. I used to sit down for dinner every second Friday; it was my turn to sit down.

SR: Really?

HB: Just a joke.

SR: Right.

HB: There were so many of us, first up, best dressed.

SR: Was it a large house?

HB: It wasn't large but it was large when we were small but going back to it years later we wondered how we fit.

SR: And how big was your kitchen table or your dining room table?

HB: Well, we had a kitchen table, a wooden kitchen table, and we had two stools that could sit six on each and we all sat on the stool, one side and the other, and you weren't even permitted to speak at the meal table; it was forbidden to speak.

SR: And you had mum and dad up either end?

HB: Yes, one at one end, one at the other. And, of course, in those days he was still ill but I do remember years before that, a few years before that, after dinner my father used to play the spoons and my mother played the mouth organ.

SR: Really?

HB: That's how it was.

SR: And was he ill for some time – he didn't just die suddenly?

HB: No, he rode motorbikes and speedway and that sort of thing and he knocked himself about. He was a very hardworking man and his blood pressure, the way things were in those days – of course it's different now – and the blood pressure was just too much for him.

6.11 And I remember my mother going overseas many years later – she came from Scotland in 1926 and she was a servant, a domestic servant and she lived in Bellevue Hill and she used to walk down to Bondi Junction and she had to take a piece of chalk to mark the walls so that she could know her way home because she came from just a one street village in Scotland and it was a bit of a shock for her and that's how she found her way.

SR: Who did she work for in Bellevue Hill?

HB: I don't know who it was. I suppose it was some of the wealthy people, I don't know. Her mother, my mother's sister and my mother came in 1926 and her brother came in 1925 and they took whatever work they could get.

SR: What was your mother's name, maiden name?

HB: Margaret.

SR: And her last name, her surname?

HB: Lamby [?].

SR: Margaret Lamby.

HB: Yes.

SR: And what did your dad do for a living?

HB: My dad mainly had trucks in the transport industry, although he did have a lot to do with the demolition of the Maroubra Speedway which was a concrete saucer track that was built in 1922 along the lines of Brooklyn's and it took a few lives, a few blokes went over the wall and died and it became pretty unpopular and I think the Housing Commission resumed the land. It was Crown land, I think, and they reclaimed it and made homes out of it but he couldn't get anyone to do the work because it was all manual work in those days. There was no pneumatic tools and it was very hard work and I think that had a lot to do with it too.

8.02 **SR: Were your parents religious?**

HB: No, my father wasn't religious at all. My mother's a little bit. She seems to think that your religion is your hands, what you do with your hands and how you conduct your life is your religion; it's your own beliefs and we're all individuals and we all believe in some being one way or the other and that was hers. Although she did encourage us to go to Sunday school and sometimes we were forced to go but we went.

SR: Were they Catholic?

HB: No, my father and mother were Methodists.

SR: And what about your father?

HB: He had no time for religion.

SR: Was he politically active?

HB: Yes, he was and my mother was also. My mother founded the Botany branch of the Labor Party in the kitchen and it wasn't unusual for Bob Heffernan or Joe Cahill to be sitting at the kitchen table sometimes.

SR: Really?

HB: Yes, yes.

SR: And she founded it?

HB: Her house, the house was used and she worked for, I think his name was Dan Curtin and Eddie Ward and a few of the other local Labor people and she was a great Labor woman. She told me she marched in 1926, banging pots and pans with Jack Lang to the Stein song down through Bondi Junction. Well, they had no instruments but they had plenty of pot lids, I suppose.

SR: And so had the Labor Party meetings in your kitchen?

HB: Yes, the first ones and, of course, I think they went to Botany Town Hall after that.

SR: That was when you were out at Botany?

HB: Yes, and then later on she was active in the Alexandria branch and she's still a member – I think she's the oldest member there.

10.00 **SR: She's still alive?**

HB: Yes, yes, she'll be eighty next year – she's as tough as teak.

SR: And when your father died, where did she go to work?

HB: She worked – it was frowned upon in those days for a woman to be a barmaid and my mother had very high morals and she was very attached to my father and was for many years after his death – and she worked in the Boundary Hotel, in Wyndham and Boundary Streets near the Eveleigh Workshop. And she worked there and also worked in a factory through the day and worked in another hotel at night because she didn't take any pension and, of course, the pensions weren't anything in those days and she worked to keep us.

SR: Even with twelve kids?

HB: Yes, we all had to do our share and she worked and kept us.

SR: Well, how did the family manage to survive – did the older ones go out and work?

HB: The older ones were working; some of them by that time were working and a couple of them were married and we just got by. She used to just put a bit more water in the soup, we just got by. And we

never wanted for anything; we always had a clean home and always had food, always.

SR: When your father died, was there any support from the neighbours?

HB: Yes. In those days when someone passed away, one of the neighbours passed away, the neighbours rallied. I can remember the day he died. I came home from school that day – he died early in the morning and I was in tears going to school – and I came home that afternoon and she sat on the lounge with a shilling, all she had was a shilling, sixpence worth of cat meat for the cat and dog and a half a loaf of bread and the lady next door gave us a tin of baked beans and that's how we kicked on or that's how she kicked on.

SR: And did it take her long to get on her feet?

HB: It took a while after the grief of it but I don't remember any support from our relatives. You didn't ask because, you know, children were seen and not heard in those days so you wouldn't know; unless she told you directly you wouldn't know. But as far as I know and as far as I'm concerned she did it all on her own and all she wanted were her children.

12.22 **SR: And did the older children who were married sort of kick in a bit?**

HB: Yes, they did, yes.

SR: So it's a very close family?

HB: We're a reasonably close family. Of course, there's always divisions in families; there's something someone said that someone didn't like and I suppose there always will be but I think that if there's anything goes wrong, with illness or anything, I think that they all rally and I'm sure they would.

SR: And when your father died.

HB: Yes, I think the kids, the smaller ones, us, were just there and the older ones – as I say, we didn't know much about it, we didn't ask questions and we didn't know what questions to ask anyway.

SR: Were you expected to contribute towards the family as you got older?

HB: We weren't expected but we did. We used to go and sell papers and I used to sell papers at Eveleigh Workshop. There was Eveleigh 1

and Eveleigh 2 and in those days you could put a hundred papers down and walk up to the next place and pick up the money from the other hundred papers and go back and pick up the money from the others. People used to put the money down and pick up the paper and always leave the money.

SR: And were you known? Was it such a neighbourhood where you were known, like the people there?

HB: Well, I wasn't. My brothers were. They played football and all that sort of thing and they were known but I wasn't because I was always the odd one out and always the loner.

SR: Always the what?

HB: The loner. Yes, I did everything alone. I didn't fit into the football mould, I didn't fit into down the pub sort of thing as young boys do, I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in to stripping down the cars and doing the engine up or anything like that, I just didn't fit in.

14.18 **SR: Did the Labor Party come to your mother's aid when your father died?**

HB: I don't know, I don't think so. I do know that I think it was the Vincent de Paul gave us some help but I think she took the initial thing and the hamper, I think, and that was all, I think that she was too proud. I think it was a case of necessity and she had to forget about the pride and go on. And I will say that although my family were not religious, two sisters from St Vincent's at Redfern came down to visit her which she has never forgotten, yes.

SR: What sort of discipline was used in your home?

HB: It was a bit like the Burma Railway.

SR: Yes?

HB: Yes. We were free to do whatever we wanted to do but we had to respect people, we had to always be courteous – we were taught that and that was the law – and we were free to go wherever we want. My mother knew where we would be, all of us would be, on Saturday night: she knew we'd be at the speedway and we'd be home at ten thirty and if you weren't home at ten thirty she'd come looking for you. We used to go to the speedway; we were all speedway mad. Because it was very close to walk to the Showground we didn't have the bus fare.

SR: What Showground?

HB: Sydney Showground.

SR: And you'd walk there?

HB: Yes. We'd all walk up together and walk across Moore Park and over out to the speedway. We used to go to Westmead Speedway and Windsor Speedway in the train and mum'd pack a lunch and we'd have to be home at six thirty and that was all there is to it.

16.05 **SR: So she made rules and you just knew what they were?**

HB: They weren't rules, they were orders.

SR: Orders. And you knew where you stood?

HB: Well, you knew where you stood because she paid the bills, she paid the rent and while she was doing that she was the boss.

SR: Was she warm towards you?

HB: Yes. She was the best mother anyone could have, the best. I mean, some people say, "Oh, yes, my mother did this and my mother did that" but my mother did without, not for months but for years she did without and she still does without. Do you know that my mother lives in a house now in Alexandria which is the first time in her life she's had hot running water?

SR: That's amazing.

HB: It's unbelievable, the first time she's had hot running water.

SR: So how would you get hot water?

HB: Well, when we were living in the terrace house we had a chip heater and we'd go and pinch a few boxes out of the Chinaman's backyard in the fruit shop, chop them up. And we'd sell it, sometimes we'd sell it, go 'round in the billy cart and sell the wood for the chip heater. We'd go and get a block of ice for people at the ice works, put them in the billy cart and take them to their place because not many people had fridges, it was mostly ice chests.

SR: And they'd give you - - -

HB: Sixpence or something to go up - a block of ice was only a shilling.

SR: And where else would you scrounge?

HB: Scrap metal.

SR: You'd sell the scrap metal?

HB: Yes, bits of scrap metal anywhere we'd find it and a penny a pound for newspapers to the fruit shop or the fish shop. Wherever there was a few bob there was a few bob. Selling papers we used to get perhaps a shilling a day and a few tips – we'd take it home to our mother.

SR: And so would she buy wood for the heater and coal or would you just sort of scrounge it up around?

18.00 HB: We'd just go 'round scrounging the bits of wood, as I say, pinching a box here and there from the fruit shop, out the back of the fruit shop. We didn't buy it but later on we had a gas copper and then a gas bath heater which was a shilling in the meter - it wasn't unusual to be halfway through a bath and the gas would run out.

SR: Did you collect bottles?

HB: Yes, yes, we collected bottles, mostly Coke bottles. Coke bottles were thruppence refundable each bottle and it was a bit of money there.

SR: Well, what did the family do for fun?

HB: We used to sit and watch the traffic lights change or sometimes we'd watch a cake rise in the oven.

SR: You went to the speedway.

HB: We went to the speedway and we used to go to the dances and things at the Trocadero.

SR: Where'd you get the money as a kid?

HB: Selling papers; we'd work seven days a week selling papers.

SR: And that's how you'd get into the speedway?

HB: Yes.

SR: Well, the Trocadero, that would have been something of your adolescence, wouldn't it?

HB: Yes, more in the teenage years. But we used to play cricket in Alexandria Park.

SR: Did your mum ever go to the speedway with you?

HB: Yes, she always went. My father used to race in the '30s and '40s and she was always there and she used to go in later life up until it closed down about ten years ago, I suppose, and there was a couple

of blankets thrown on the grass and all the family were there - it was a meeting place.

SR: Did you mostly go out with your brothers and sisters or were there friends in the neighbourhood?

HB: Yes. We weren't encouraged, really, to have friends because my mother didn't want to feed any more kids. We had our friends, of course. Sometimes they'd come over but you can imagine if one of us each brought a friend home how many mouths there were to feed. So it was generally discouraged to bring anyone home and she didn't encourage us to stay away either; she didn't like the idea of us staying at other people's homes.

20.18 **SR: Could kids come over after school to play?**

HB: We were selling papers - we were too busy for that.

SR: In the evening these days everybody watches television. What did you do in the evenings?

HB: We used to listen to Jimmy Shand & his Band with all the Scottish singers and we'd listen on the radio to Police Files and Hop Harry [?] and Tarzan and in those days on a Sunday they used to have the Sunday comics. You used to buy the paper and they used to read out the comic on the radio. And we had a television but it was only a seventeen inch Admiral and I remember when we got it we had to put all the blankets up at the windows to make the place as dark as possible to get the darkness for the TV and I remember the last show on television was Superman at eight thirty – it closed at nine, it didn't open till four.

SR: And was it all snowy?

HB: Yes, mainly. There was no such thing as an outdoor aerial at first, they were all indoor. But if we did happen to go anywhere after my father died an uncle used to come down and take us to the mountains or for a drive and we'd count the TV aerials as we drove past – we'd be lucky to count a dozen all day. Of course, now it's different.

SR: When your father was alive, did you go out? Well, he would have been sick in that last year.

HB: Yes, he was sick in about the last year but prior to that it was like a conveyor belt: we'd all line up for a bath and in the bath, washed, dried pyjamas, in the car and we'd all go down to Bennelong Point of a Sunday night in the car and have fish and chips and a barbeque –

well, not a barbeque but fish and chips – at Bennelong Point where the old tram depot was which is now the Opera House.

22.19 **SR: And there was a fish and chip place there?**

HB: We got the fish and chips at Newtown.

SR: And you'd just go and sit down there and look at the water and the harbour?

HB: Yes, yes.

SR: What sort of car did you have?

HB: My father had a different car every week. He'd buy one at the auctions, he'd do it up, polish her up, clean her all up and my mother would help and then someone'd buy it and he'd go and buy another one and do the same. And we had all sorts of cars: Nash cars, Oaklands, we had a Hudson Terraplane with a dickie seat in the back, a blue one, and had all sorts of cars. He had Willys-Overlands; you name it, he had it.

SR: He sounds like a character.

HB: He was a character, he was.

SR: How old was he when he died?

HB: Forty eight.

SR: It's very young.

HB: It is, it is, considering these days the medical know-how, it seems such a waste, doesn't, it?

SR: Did your father like his work?

HB: He was always chopping and changing his work - it was mostly around trucks and things and he was a motor mechanic. But my father had a habit of not wanting to pay for anything. He got a pianola once and when they came for the payments he threw the men out but they got the pianola back anyway because in those days everyone was on the make or on the take. There was a struggle in those days for things; the luxuries that we have today were unheard of and everyone just about was trying to get ahead.

24.09 **SR: And that was in the '50s. Had your father been involved in the war, WWII?**

HB: No, he wasn't. He was too young to go to the war.

SR: So in the '50s they had that period of shortages - they couldn't import a lot into Australia.

HB: I don't remember as I was only - - -

SR: But there was plenty of employment.

HB: Yes, it seems that under Mr Menzies everyone had some credit and everyone had a car and everyone could afford a house if they wanted to.

SR: Your parents, were they buying your house?

HB: No, we never owned a home.

SR: Rented. What about your mum when she started working in the pub – how did she like that?

HB: She liked it. She was very popular and she was well-liked, well-liked and, of course, in the old days too, men had respect for women and in those days the barmaid ruled the roost: if she wanted someone barred from the hotel she just said so if some customer offended her in any way. But I used to see her in the hotel sometimes because we'd sell papers and we were allowed to go in the pub. And in those days they used to close at six thirty and open again at seven thirty and the same blokes'd come back.

SR: What do you mean "open again at seven thirty"?

HB: Well, they had six thirty closing or six o'clock closing and they used to ring a bell and everyone'd have to leave the hotel and they'd close the hotel and then at seven or seven thirty they'd all come back again.

SR: At the back door?

HB: No, back into the hotel - they had to close for an hour.

SR: Really?

HB: Yes.

SR: That's crazy.

HB: Well.

SR: So your mum would have dinner or something then?

HB: Well, I think her shift would finish at that point.

SR: She was home in the evenings?

HB: Yes, yes. It was a pleasure once - I remember once when she left the hotel and she was there for us when we went to school. It was terrific to have her at home because we had to get ourselves breakfast and get ourselves dressed and off to school.

26.15 **SR: Because she'd start early?**

HB: Yes. And she'd come home about nine thirty, I suppose, and get changed to go work at the factory across the road – they were making television parts in those days.

SR: So she worked in a factory?

HB: Yes, till about three o'clock and then she worked in another hotel from about four till, I think, seven or eight o'clock or something like that.

SR: And then in an early opener in the morning?

HB: In the morning, yes.

SR: So she had three jobs?

HB: Yes, six days a week. I often wondered why she used to sleep so much on Sundays.

SR: She wouldn't have had much of a social life.

HB: She didn't, although I think the hotel was a social life on its own, I think that that was a social life on its own.

SR: And she never remarried?

HB: Yes, she remarried but that wasn't much of a success.

SR: Were you young when that happened?

HB: Yes, I wasn't very pally with him in the beginning but as I got older - I think I was about nineteen when he passed away – and we got on great in the end, so I wasn't such a bad bloke after all and neither was he.

SR: Would you describe your father a being happy?

HB: Yes, he was a happy-go-lucky bloke and always a great joker, always a bit of fun. He was serious but never nasty, never nasty.

SR: And what about your mum?

HB: She's always been the same, always been strong and she still has fun.

28.06 **SR: Who were your friends?**

HB: Well, I still see a friend of mine that I went to school with in 1957 and we're still friends. We've been friends all these years and he has a daughter and I have a son – well, I've got three sons, he's got two children, a boy and a girl – and his daughter was my son's childhood sweetheart and they're still friends – and, funny enough, we both have the same surname but not the same family.

SR: And when you were with your friends from school, what sort of things did you do?

HB: At school?

SR: Yes.

HB: We played football in the playground. We weren't allowed to kick the ball in the school at Redfern, we had to throw it.

SR: What school did you go to?

HB: George Street Redfern. And if the ball went over to the girls' school, Miss Homberg [?] kept the ball.

SR: And what about in the neighbourhood?

HB: As I say, I didn't mix much with the other kids, I generally kept to myself, but I do remember we played cricket down the park all day, all day until it got dark, we played all day.

SR: In the holidays?

HB: Yes, on Sundays we played all day.

SR: What sort of a neighbourhood was it, like just talking about Alexandria at that time?

HB: It was a bit rough.

SR: In what way?

HB: There's a lot of young fellows could fight in those days. I mean, that was one of the rules, you learnt to fight, but generally speaking it was good because I don't remember any jealousies, I don't remember anyone being jealous of anyone. I think that if you got on and you kicked on all right I think everyone was happy for you.

SR: Was it mostly a working class sort of neighbourhood?

HB: Oh, yes, yes. Well, Alexandria was a very big industrial area; it was the little burning hammer of Australia they called it. Had very large factories, Austral Bronze and Bernard-Smith, Metters and large factories.

30.09 **SR: Did most people work locally?**

HB: A lot of them did, yes. A lot of men worked in the goods station at Alexandria, the goods yard in Garden Street, a lot of men. That went from Garden Street right down almost to Erskineville, the railway line. There was casual work and permanent work there, there was always work around. When you left school you could go from job to job. If you didn't like it, just leave and go to another job and that's how it was in those days.

SR: When you were a kid could you ever go 'round the factories and sort of scrounge up things, like if a factory was making something that you might have a use for?

HB: Yes, there was a comic factory across the road and we used to go and snaffle the comics, any ones they threw out, some without covers and things.

SR: What brand or what comics?

HB: Oh, all sorts. They just printed for general printers, I think, and we used to go and help out in the wheat factory across the road, Maloney [?]. [break in recording]

SR: So I've heard, talking to other people, that people would go around different places where things were being manufactured and they'd either know somebody there and there'd be a bit of tradeoff or scrounging.

HB: Well, I do remember once a truck overturned in Waterloo and it had soap powder on it and I remember people picking it up with buckets, the soap powder. It was all over the road in Raglan Street and I remember that everyone's washing was that white for months after that.

SR: What do you know about other neighbourhood kids and what they used to do? You must have heard a few stories.

HB: We didn't mix with the Erskineville mob.

SR: Why was that?

HB: The Alexandria mob were different and the Redfern mob were different again and the Waterloo mobs were different again. I don't know what it was. I don't think there was any struggle or anything like that. I just don't think that they really associated with one another.

32.00 **SR: And you don't know why?**

HB: No, because I wasn't part of it but I do remember them saying that such and such came down from Waterloo or such and such came down from Redfern.

SR: And that was just kids or was that the adult world too?

HB: Just as kids.

SR: The adults wouldn't think that as well?

HB: No, no, no, because kids were in a world of our own.

SR: And did any areas have a higher social status than others?

HB: Not to my knowledge. I think that there were some kids whose family had a few bob and they were well-dressed but that's about all, I think. I don't think that anyone thought that they were better than anyone else – I can't remember it.

SR: Did any neighbourhood have a reputation for being worse than others?

HB: Well, I think the Redfern boys, they were the tougher of the lot – I suppose they were because of what you hear. I those days, yes, I think that the Redfern boys were a bit tougher and I believe the Ultimo kids were even tougher than that.

SR: You know when you're older and you're wanting to go out with girls, was it ever a problem saying that you came from Alexandria?

HB: No, you just took someone out from Alexandria.

SR: Right.

HB: I remember taking a girl from Alexandria out to the Easter Show with thirty shillings and I took her to the Show and I bought bags and so forth and went and had an ice cream in Centennial Park and brought her home in the bus and everything and you still had ten bob left. I went out with her for about five or six years I suppose we were together.

SR: And what about the other local kids, do you know what they did? You were selling papers in the afternoon.

HB: Most of them were selling papers. We used to hop on the tram and sell papers on the tram going down to St Peters or going down Botany Road. Sometimes we'd go into some other paperboy's area and we'd have to settle it.

SR: And what's that mean?

34.00 HB: Between ourselves.

SR: And the tram drivers used to just let you on?

HB: Well, if you hopped on a bus or a tram you used to be able to walk straight through, "Paper", "Thank you", and then you'd get off at the next stop or a few stops down the road.

SR: How many years were you selling papers for?

HB: I think about five years.

SR: From what age?

HB: From about eleven years old.

SR: Till you were about sixteen.

HB: M'mm.

SR: And did you do anything else, odd jobs?

HB: I used to have a cartage firm with billy carts, Brennan Brothers.

SR: Tell me.

HB: We had it embossed across the box and it used to have a flat board on the box and you'd push it and go here and there, take groceries home for people and blocks of ice.

SR: They'd just give you a yell?

HB: Yes. They'd see you up the road, "Now, don't forget on Friday I've got to go up and get me shopping and you come down here, come up to Shugg's* and take their stuff home for me". "O.K".

SR: And they'd pay you sixpence or something?

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*Frederick Shugg was a grocer at 41 Botany Road, Waterloo in the 1950s.

HB: Yes, thruppence or sixpence, whatever. I remember sitting outside a house for an old lady in Wyndham Street once; I minded the house for her all day; she gave me a penny.

SR: What?

HB: Yes, a penny. Well, of course, she was a very old woman and she must have thought it was a lot of money.

SR: And why were you minding the house?

HB: I don't know. She just asked me to mind the house. In those days where we lived, my mother used to open the front door and the back door and air the house while she went around Botany Road to do the shopping and when she came back the postman might be there, having a cup of tea, reading the paper.

SR: In the house?

HB: Yes. The key was never out of the door night and day. When the door was closed of a night and someone came they just opened the front door. The key was in the door night and day. Amazing but true.

SR: And never got robbed?

HB: Never, never. People didn't steal from people who didn't have anything. These days it's different but in those days people usually didn't steal from people who didn't have much. They'd say, "Well, if you haven't got much" and they probably wouldn't think …….. That's how it was.

36.18 **SR: And that code was never broken?**

HB: Never broken, not to my knowledge.

SR: And did you have the same postman? These days they change all the time.

HB: Yes, we had one postman. He used to wear a pith helmet; that was the uniform and they used to make two deliveries a day and Saturday morning as well so if you didn't get the letter in the morning you may get it in the afternoon. And I remember finding a key for the NRMA and it had a little badge on it, "If found, return to NRMA, 3 Spring Street, Sydney. Reward: five shillings" and they sent me a cheque for five shillings and I waited and waited for weeks for the postman to bring this cheque and eventually I got the cheque and I spent the five shillings.

SR: And was this just your house where the postman would feel comfortable to go in and make himself a cup of tea?

HB: My mother was friendly with everyone, she was never jealous, although I cannot remember my mother going into another person's home. She wasn't a gossiper and she wouldn't go into anyone's house; nothing could get her into someone else's house.

SR: Even if she was invited?

HB: She wouldn't go.

SR: Were things like your meat and vegetables and all that delivered?

HB: No, no, we were lucky to buy them.

SR: Did you grow your own in the garden?

HB: No, no. We had food and whatever my mother needed she bought in Botany Road. We didn't have refrigeration as such so if she was going to make some snags or some chops she'd buy them that day and cook them that night so there wasn't any need for it.

SR: And did you always have your main meal at the end of the day?

HB: Yes, always. We used to all come home for lunch; because we lived pretty close to the school we all used to walk home for lunch.

38.00 **SR: And what would you have for lunch?**

HB: Oh, sandwiches, Vegemite and all that sort of thing, peanut butter. I remember when we were selling papers we used to put a layby on a Chinese meal. We used to leave a shilling every day at the Chinese shop and on Friday night all the paperboys'd get together and have a banquet, so we used to layby our Chinese meal.

SR: What Chinese shop was that?

HB: The Canton in Botany Road.

SR: Botany Road, Redfern?

HB: Waterloo.

SR: Did anybody else make themselves comfortable in your house aside from the postman?

HB: The order man used to come, the Workers Cash Orders and that.

SR: What's that?

HB: It used to be you'd buy – I think that you used to get a cash order and you could spend it on whatever you wanted to spend it on but normally there was the stewards used to come in a van with all sheets and pillowcases and clothing and brooms and mops on the roof of the truck and they used to come down on Saturday morning and you'd like something, "Oh, yeah, five bob a week" or "three bob a week" or whatever it was and then the order man always used to come in for a cup of tea – everyone, the kettle was always on, always.

SR: And there's usually somebody at home, given such a big family?

HB: Yes, always, there was always someone at home.

SR: About the rest of the neighbourhood, how would you describe it? Was it affluent or poor or what was the standard of living?

HB: Well, I don't think it was poor. I think the perception of Redfern being a poor area is way off the mark because it was a pretty affluent area many years ago and I don't think that it deteriorated that much. I mean, Alexandria and Waterloo, it was a pretty affluent area but most people worked. Well, everyone worked. If you were not sick you worked. That was the code: you worked.

40.17 **SR: People were comfortable?**

HB: Well, people were comfortable. They always had a bed, they had a feed and they had a roof over their head and that's all they needed, a few beers and so forth. There were exceptions, I suppose. You don't see many bottleos now. We used to see the old bottleo coming down the street, collecting bottles, pushing a big barrow. Things have gone. Clothes props, they don't sell clothes props any more, fresh rabbits any more, they don't sell them.

SR: They were still selling rabbits?

HB: Yes, in the early '60s.

SR: Most of this, are we talking the late '50s?

HB: Late '50s, early '60s.

SR: Were there any places that you weren't allowed to go?

HB: Yes. We weren't allowed to go into any hotels or clubs or things like that. We were allowed to go to the Police Boys' Club and that sort of

thing but we weren't permitted to go to the movies, the picture show, unless my mother said so.

SR: Why was that?

HB: I don't know, she never said. We didn't have any restrictions but she had something about the picture show.

SR: Because most people talk about one of the things that they did was going to the pictures – it seemed like a very big deal – but that was hearing that from people who were children in the '30s.

HB: Yes, it was a big deal, it was a big deal. We used to go to the Lawson Theatre at Redfern which was where the T&T towers are now. I remember seeing *Tammy* [?] and *April Love* up there, and the serials, of course.

42.03 **SR: Was Wirth's Circus still coming here in the '50s and '60s?**

HB: Well, I think it was Ashton's Circus mainly. We were friends of the Ashton family, actually, and my father knew them very well. We still see Vinnie, actually, who's one of their descendants. And they used to bring the circus in at the bottom of the goods siding in Alexandria and the elephants used to drag the carts up the street. When the circus came to town, the elephants would drag all the big carts with the lions and everything else up Henderson Road, up Raglan Street and into Redfern Oval or Redfern Park where they used to hold the circus.

SR: Was that ever called the 'Exhibition Park'?

HB: The Exhibition Park was Prince Alfred Park.

SR: Yes, it's off Cleveland Street.

HB: Yes, that was Prince Alfred – there was an exhibition building there many years ago.

SR: And this is a different location we're talking about?

HB: Yes, Redfern Park next to Redfern Oval. Well, the Redfern Oval was the Prince Albert Cricket Ground prior to that.

SR: And did you ever go to these circuses?

HB: No.

SR: How did your dad know them?

HB: My father was born in Paddington and my grandfather had the water supply there, a well, in Glenmore Road and, of course, prior to that there was Lachlan Swamp which was Centennial Park and the gravity, Busby's Bore used to come down into the city because of the Mill Pond because the Tank Stream was polluted and they drew water from Paddington, they drew water from the Mill Pond at Botany and Eastlakes.

SR: Can you remember any local characters?

HB: Plenty of them.

SR: Can you tell us about some?

HB: There was a lot of people, men, around who were good fighters and I can remember seeing fights outside the hotels on Saturdays. And, of course, it wasn't just a fight or an altercation, a few punches, these fights lasted for half an hour, and then when the fight was over they'd change their shirts and have a wash and have a drink; that was it.

44.20 **SR: Were they fighting as a bet or because they were annoyed?**

HB: No, they were fighting over a point of interest, a point of principle, I suppose. Someone thought that they were better than someone and it was an honour to go the distance with a bloke in those days. If this bloke was a good fighter and you went the distance, well, you was as good as him and there was none of the, "Come back and shoot you later", there was none of that; they copped it sweet, as they said; if you got beat, you got beat by a better man and you shook hands on it and that was it, a man's word.

SR: And what else can you remember? Are there any sort of people that were eccentrics or people who stood out?

HB: There was one man who lived in Wyndham Street who was a hermit. I don't think he ever had any electricity and he just used to read and his house was all boarded up and wired up with mesh and you might see him once or twice a year if you were lucky and he just lived there on his own. He lived in army-type clothes, just army jumpers and warm clothing – I think he was an Englishman. I remember him coming to a factory once and getting some timber for his fire – never spoke to anyone.

SR: Were there any people that you had to avoid?

HB: No.

SR: Were there any people that you were particularly encouraged to associate with?

HB: No, it was more or less left up to ourselves.

SR: And how far did you roam as a kid, say like as a ten year old?

HB: Well, as I say, we didn't have any restrictions. I used to clear out from me mother after a bit of a blue and I'd get me airline bag and mouth organ and I'd go up to the park and then when it got a bit too dark I'd go home again.

46.03 But we used to go out to Botany for a swim in the Mill Pond – they used to call it Sixey [?] – and the tannery, the water at the Mill Pond, just this side of the Atlantic Bridge between Botany and Mascot, we used to swim in the fresh water there in the nude.

SR: And did that water come from the tannery?

HB: Yes. Well, it wasn't from the tannery, it was the Mill Pond. The tannery used to empty into it, not at that point, not exactly there.

SR: But some of the waste would have come from the - - -

HB: Probably, yes. We didn't think anything of it; it didn't worry the eels.

SR: Did anyone get sick?

HB: No.

SR: Did you ever go out to the airport?

HB: We used to ride our pushbikes out to the airport and we used to go to Ansett and they had a big shed at Ansett, a big grey shed and wooden steps and we'd pull up out there and the people used to bring us out packets of biscuits and a glass of milk. It was different in those days.

SR: Did lots of people do that, lots of little kids?

HB: No. We had a lurk, "Let's go out to the airport and get some biscuits". "Yeah". Then we'd ride our pushbike when we could afford the pushbike.

SR: What do you mean "afford" - when you saved up for that?

HB: Yes, or my mother paid a quid for one somewhere, second-hand one, or we got one at the Salvation Army at Tempe; got one for ten bob and changed the tyres on it, cleaned her up.

SR: What can you tell me about the other kids in the neighbourhood?

HB: I didn't mix with them that much. I know that there were some very poor families. I know that there were some people who lived in our lane that were very poor, no electricity and that, but everyone helped one another in those days.

SR: Why would they have been worse off? There was a lot of work around.

HB: Yes, I think it was just a matter of – oh, I don't know what it was – there were big families too and I think just there wasn't enough money to go 'round, I suppose.

48.05 **SR: So where did you go to school?**

HB: Redfern School in George Street.

SR: And what was it like?

HB: I enjoyed school so much I missed half a day in six years.

SR: What was so good about it?

HB: I just liked school. I liked the teachers and matter of fact I still associate with my teacher from third class.

SR: Who was that?

HB: Barclay Wright was his name. He now owns the family business, Master Touch where they make the pianola rolls at Petersham and I still go and visit him. And the teachers were very strict. There was a couple of crook ones as far as treatment of kids went: if you went to school without your homework book or you did something wrong you copped it but if you kept your nose clean you were O.K.

SR: And what sort of discipline would be used there?

HB: Well, I remember you weren't allowed out the school grounds and they had a small cyclone fence and I saw a chap trying to cross the road so I jumped the fence to give him a hand and I happened to be caught by one of the teachers who disliked me and he put me on the verandah until after the lunchtime assembly and then he made an example of me and gave me the cane and he gave me the T-square across the backside and did everything in his power to make me cry but I wouldn't give him the benefit of it. I think it was only about eleven at the time. And he said, "Now you can tell the school why

you were outside the school grounds, tell us your reasons" and I said, "Well, there was a blind man trying to get across the road and I went out to help him". Well, their jaws dropped and I was immediately appointed head of the barrier patrol, the head of the march music, I was the head monitor for everything. And that went on for a few weeks until I put 'A Pub with no Beer' on instead of the 'St George Standard' and then I was demoted again.

50.06 But generally I enjoyed school, I enjoyed schoolwork and I enjoyed some of the teachers and they were happy days, they were very happy days. I repeated school because when I started school I was actually four. My mother put me in the school with my elder brother as twins and I had to repeat a year in sixth class.

SR: Did she mean to have so many children, your mother?

HB: I don't know now whether she meant to or not – I never asked her – but she doesn't regret it, I know that.

SR: Did most of the local kids go to the Redfern School?

HB: Yes. We actually lived in Alexandria in Wyndham Street, this side of Botany Road. For some reason we went to Redfern School and not Alexandria and Alexandria School was closer.

SR: So most of the locals would have gone to Alexandria School?

HB: Yes, the Alexandria kids would have or Waterloo, perhaps Waterloo, but not so much Redfern. So although I was associating with the Redfern kids at school, I wasn't associating with the Alexandria kids at home.

SR: And were you accepted at Redfern even though you were living in Alexandria?

HB: Oh, yes, my brothers could fight – I was accepted.

SR: On the basis of the reputation of your brothers?

HB: Yes, yes.

SR: And you weren't a fighter?

HB: No, I used to break out in cuts and bruises - no, I wasn't but they were.

SR: How was that, being a kid like that and even a young man, not being somebody who liked the pub scene?

HB: It was hard because they used to think I was a bit odd.

SR: A wonder they didn't say you were gay.

HB: Well, they didn't call it that in those days – I think they called you "pansy" or something – but perhaps they did, I don't know, but it didn't matter because I wasn't part of it. I knew that my interests were different from other people's and I don't regret it at all - in fact, I'd encourage it.

52.08 **SR: So how did your interests develop, what did you become interested in?**

HB: Music, I was always interested in music. I never learned to play the guitar till later in life because I wanted to play by Saturday night. I believed the back of the comics, you know, "You can play in three weeks", and I couldn't and I used to make bits of wood with nails and fishing line to make a steel guitar and all sorts of things. But the billy carts and the racing, we used to race billy carts on Sundays down Boundary Hill where the hotel is, thirty or forty kids used to race their billy carts.

SR: Who organised this?

HB: We just all got together; one kid saw us racing the billy carts so they made one and turned up. We had a heap of kids. Of course, some of the people that lived in the back of the hotel didn't like it because they were all ball bearings – very noisy. And we knew a fellow from the airport who used to give us the ball bearings from the Constellation gearboxes and they were all whopping big things and, of course, no one else could get them.

SR: And you used them as -?

HB: Back wheels for height and the wider they were the better you slid on the asphalt.

SR: Did you bet on these races?

HB: No. We didn't have any money to bet. We just used to race and have a number and sort of the vogue of speedway cars. A few times we had a few smashes, smashed into cars. We never had anyone at the bottom to say, "Oh, no, there's a car coming". Some bloke'd be coming along Garden Street and look and there'd be thirty or forty billy carts coming at him.

SR: You must have got abused a bit.

HB: Yes, yes, but that's as far as it went: "Go on, you kids. Get home, get home. I'll call the police", that's it.

SR: Sounds like fun.

HB: It was a happy life, it was a good life. We had nothing but we made the best of what we had.

54.00 **SR: Well, you certainly were mixing with the local kids then.**

HB: Well only in that type of thing, in the billy carts, that's about all because that was my interest and they were coming into my interest.

SR: How old were you when you set up Brennan Brothers?

HB: I think about nine years old.

SR: And did you get your other brothers to help?

HB: No, no, I did it myself.

SR: And how many billy carts did you have?

HB: Only had the one, there was one in the fleet. Yes, I remember making a sign, "Haulage here, haulage there, haulage everywhere".

SR: That's pretty good. Did you have toys or books as a kid?

HB: We had books but we weren't allowed to have comics even though we pinched them. If my mother found them she'd throw them out because she didn't believe that they were of benefit to you.

SR: Comics were viewed as rubbish, weren't they?

HB: Yes, they were. Well, she did, she hated them and she threw them out. And we read books and that.

SR: What sort of books would have read or been interested in?

HB: The classics, 'The Last of the Mohicans', 'Robins Crusoe', few of those type, 'Tom Sawyer'.

SR: What smells can you remember?

HB: Smell of the workshop at Eveleigh. There was a certain smell about Alexandria.

SR: And what was that?

HB: An industrial smell.

SR: Would it have been smoggier then than it is now?

HB: Oh, yes, yes. Some days it was more so. Some days you wouldn't hang the washing on the line either because of the soot.

SR: There were the wood fires.

HB: There were wood fires but there was soot too. People conducted their lives by the railway whistle, the seven thirty whistle in the morning, the four o'clock whistle in the afternoon and then there was an eleven o'clock whistle of a night at the glass in Waterloo.

56.00 **SR: ……. …… that you'd know what you were - - -**

HB: Knew what time it was.

SR: What about sex education?

HB: It was all trial and error in those days. Sex was never mentioned, it was never mentioned in the house.

SR: What about amongst the kids?

HB: Well, I suppose there was, I can't remember. I think we kept to ourselves in that respect but it was never mentioned in the house. My mother would never – it just wasn't mentioned.

SR: How did she explain all those children?

HB: Well, she didn't have to explain. But, as I say, it was all trial and error: you learnt by your mistakes.

SR: What would happen if one of the family got pregnant before they were married?

HB: I don't know, you wouldn't ask. I suppose in those days once it was known the wedding was pretty quick - I suppose that's how it was. Of course, it's different these days again but I think that if some girl got herself in trouble then the bloke did the right thing by her. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. It's unthinkable now.

SR: Yes. Can you remember any big events?

HB: When they stopped running the trams to St Peters that was a big thing. Everyone scaled the tram, went for a ride here and there, but there was nothing much happened.

SR: You know when you were selling the papers – this just reminded me – you know the paperboys getting on and off the trams and going along, didn't people get hurt or run over?

HB: I suppose they did, yes, some kids. I remember a bloke on a pushbike going under a tram, actually, just after we moved into the area - they were very dangerous things.

SR: Do you think it was a more dangerous time to live than now?

58.02 HB: Oh, definitely. Look at the child restraints and things in cars now. We had an accident on the corner where the bloke was flung out and the car rolled on him. The men run out of the pub and lifted the car off the poor bloke that was underneath it. And if someone had an accident on the corner, people would come out of the pub and say, "Oh, look, you'd better call an ambulance" and they'd be helping everybody, everybody would be helping one another, and they'd push the car off the road for them. Everyone helped one another; that was the difference.

SR: It'd be more dangerous in terms of accidents. Were there people who were incapacitated by being involved in industrial accidents?

HB: Well, I don't know because I was in the more or less – when I started work I worked in a factory but I suppose there were people that were injured at work, I don't know – but I was more or less in the transport field myself. When I was able to get a licence I started driving small trucks and then worked me way to bigger trucks and eventually I worked in buses for over twenty years, private buses.

SR: How would you describe Alexandria physically, say in the late '50s?

HB: A Garden of Eden, something new ever day, something exciting all the time.

SR: Like what?

HB: Just the small things; it didn't have to be a big event.

SR: Like what? Tell us.

HB: Waking up in the morning your name wasn't in the [*Sydney Morning] Herald*.

SR: What do you mean?

HB: Everything was exciting; it was a thrill to do things.

SR: Was that because you were a kid?

HB: Probably – we didn't have that many worries but I do remember being without a father and I remember being upset about it, not having a father, when other kids had fathers and I do remember that. But apart from that it was a very happy childhood.

SR: You liked waking up in the morning and thinking what you were going to do today?

HB: Yes. Every day was different. I didn't know that at the time but looking back I now see that I was enthusiastic about life.

60.06 **SR: It might just be rose-coloured glasses.**

HB: Well, no. I can honestly say that they were happy days, especially when I became a teenager and girls came on the scene, that was a great interest.

SR: What age are we talking about?

HB: Well, I started going out with one girl when I was about eleven and going out with her for quite a few years.

SR: And how did your mother feel about that?

HB: Never said boo.

SR: Could you bring her home?

HB: Yes. But her mother wouldn't let me go to her place when she wasn't there.

SR: I want you to physically describe Alexandria in the late '50s. Can you do that?

HB: In what -?

SR: Well, earlier you've said that it was a bit more smoggier and before you said you remembered the rusted roofs. Is there any way – I mean, I know it's a hard question.

HB: Well, in those days the men who worked on the roads used to light a fire and boil a billy. Well, you wouldn't be allowed to do that now. And when a lot of the factories and the workshops closed down, there was less people around. I mean, the hotels, within an area of, say, a hundred yards you had the Alexandria Hotel, the Lord Raglan, the Cricketers Arms and the Abbotts Hotel and every hotel was full - hotels dotted the area.

SR: And that would have been the social centre of the place?

HB: Yes, it always was. This is long before the days of clubs and poker machines. The Lord Raglan on Friday night, if you didn't get there at six o'clock and get a seat you couldn't get into the lounge and they used to have a sing-a-long and all that.

PART 2

62.18 **SR: Interview with Mr Harry Brennan, 27th of September 1994. We were talking about the pubs being social centres. What changes have you seen? Some of the things that you've been saying, it's more been a comparison in some ways.**

HB: See, a lot more families moving out of the area. The families have grown and they're all spread out all over the place and you go somewhere and, "Aren't you one of such and such's brothers? I remember you when you used to sell papers" or, "I remember you when you used to call the housie at the Town Hall" and all that sort of thing. The big thing was going to housie on Monday and Thursday night, Alexandria Town Hall; that was a big thing, big social thing for everyone.

SR: When you were a kid?

HB: Yes, and I used to sell soft drinks there and then Bonox and coffee and all that and I used to sort the cards out and then I used to sell the cards and give the change out and I worked me way up to be the caller.

SR: Did most of the kids sort of have odd jobs and do things like that or were you an exception?

HB: Everyone had something to do, everyone. If you didn't do something you didn't have any money because your family couldn't give it to you. So if you didn't find something to do to make a few bob, well, you did without.

SR: And did most people hand over the money to their families or would they keep it as pocket money?

HB: Well, we handed it over.

SR: And would your mum give you some back?

64.00 HB: In those days it was three bob into the speedway – there was four of us so that was twelve shillings, a dollar twenty these days but it was a lot of money then.

SR: What other changes do you remember in this area or how is the area different today?

HB: Well, as I say, a lot of families have moved away and it's a different type of people moved into the area.

SR: What sort of people?

HB: I think more business people are in the area. I think that they realised – I think we've got another Paddington on our hands – they realised the closeness to the city and Alexandria is the ideal place. It's fifteen minutes to the beach that way, ten minutes to the airport that way and ten minutes to the city that way so I think it's better suited, more so than the eastern suburbs, perhaps.

SR: Did you ever go to the beach as a kid?

HB: Yes, we used to all walk out to Maroubra, we'd walk out to Maroubra Beach. Sometimes we'd get a bus, not very often. We'd ride our pushbikes out there – sometimes we'd walk out to Coogee Beach – Coogee was closer.

SR: Why wouldn't you take the bus?

HB: Didn't have the money.

SR: Were the buses expensive?

HB: Well, sixpence was a lot of money.

SR: Did you ever go on holidays?

HB: Never. We didn't look for holidays; we were content doing what we were doing. We didn't look for a holiday and we didn't need a holiday. Few people went away to The Entrance or whatever but we never went away.

SR: Were most people living in rented housing?

HB: I couldn't say but I know that we were and a lot of people were. Perhaps some people who were married and had two wages they owned a home but we never did own it.

SR: Yet even though they were renting they'd stay in the same house?

HB: For years, for years and years. We lived in a house which was railway property.

66.05 **SR: So you never had problems from the landlord putting up the rent every three months or anything?**

HB: No, never. And there was ten houses in the terrace and we lived in nine of them at some stage; I'd come home from school and my mother had moved, she'd moved in a house up the terrace.

SR: So you were moving a lot?

HB: Yes, only in the terrace, though. We lived in Wyndham Street from that till 1986 and there were ten houses in the terrace and we lived in nine of them at one stage or another.

SR: And how come – just one looked like a better option or something?

HB: Well, mum thought it was better. It had a better bath or had a better stove, so "Oh, well, we might take that", so she'd paint it all out and cement the yard and put new lino down and boom. Didn't matter if it was smaller, it was better, because a lot of them were married and moved away by then.

SR: Yes, gradually over the years you would have had them moving out.

HB: Yes.

SR: What's your happiest memory?

HB: Well, I had a lot of happy memories, a lot of happy memories but I do remember the thrill of getting those certificates from school for my attendance but there were a lot of happy memories.

SR: You got certificates at school for -?

HB: Attendance. They were lost. Our house burnt down in Wyndham Street and we lost everything that was in there and that was some of the things that went.

SR: What's your saddest memory?

HB: I think my father's death would have to be.

SR: Did it take a long time to recover from that?

HB: Well, I was too young to know what grief was. I knew that I was sad but I didn't know what grief was.

SR: What's your most vivid memory?

68.07 HB: Putting a skyrocket in the tramline in Botany Road.

SR: Did what?

HB: We used to put a skyrocket in the tramline and light the skyrocket and it'd shoot up Redfern, up the hill and turn right into Redfern Street, whoosh.

SR: Cracker Night.

HB: M'mm.

SR: Would you always celebrate - - -

HB: Everyone did. There was always a bonfire every year and there was a paddock in Wyndham Street which a factory's on now – on those days it was just a paddock and I think it was a railway property too – and we built a bonfire and me brother brought a truckload of timber for us and we built this. And they interviewed us the day before and someone lit it that night so the bonfire was lit a night before – someone from another area, I suppose.

SR: Did all the kids in the neighbourhood get together for Cracker Night?

HB: Yes.

SR: And all pooled the crackers or what did you do?

HB: We weren't interested in the floral crackers, the fancy light ones. We were only interested in putting a double bunger in a letterbox or putting one under a tin and blowing it sky high; we were only interested in the noise. If we had ten bob to spend on cracker, well, we'd buy double happys, bungers and tuppeny bungers.

SR: And you put them in letterboxes?

HB: Yes, wherever we could.

SR: Were there any accidents or any hassle from that ……..

HB: No, not to my knowledge; I don't think anyone got murdered or anything like that.

SR: In the year, what would be the time of the year you'd most look forward to?

HB: Christmas.

SR: And what would your family do at Christmas?

HB: Well, we'd always get together at Christmastime and all see one another and that – that was the most exciting time – or my birthday.

70.03 **SR: …….. …….. presents and that?**

HB: Oh, yes. It wasn't much but it was a present just the same. I never got the ukulele I wanted that was in the pawn shop window.

SR: What about Easter?

HB: Well, of course there was the Easter Show and you save up your money to go to the Show.

SR: And would most kids do that?

HB: Yes, I think they still do it but I think they're talking in hundreds now; we were only talking in pence.

SR: Is there anything else I should have asked you?

HB: No, I think you've covered about all of it. I mean, there's lots of things now are gone. Like Botany Road was the hub. They used to have a clothes' auction, Carburry's [?] clothes' auction, and they used to have the milk bar and we used to go to the milk bar and have a chocolate ice cream in a dish with malt. There was Mrs. Quail's [?] shop. She had a small shop in Botany Road where you used to walk downstairs into a parlour. It was a milk bar/parlour where you'd sit at a table and they had the thick glasses and the thick dishes. There was Barker Davis [?] where they had a TV in the window and a speaker outside on the roof so you could hear what was being shown on TV.

SR: When TV was first introduced, did you do that a bit?

HB: Yes, we were the night riders - we used to run around the streets of a night.

SR: And what -?

HB: We weren't allowed to terrorise but we used to go around and look at the TV and we'd go and lay in the grass and put some black cotton on someone's doorknocker and all the things kids did. When they opened the door we'd slacken off the fishing line or whatever and then they'd close it again, we'd knock again and they'd open it again and continue to do that.

SR: This is you and your brothers?

HB: Yes. Yes, it was a happy life, it was a good life. Things were so different in those days: people were more patient, people helped one another. Of course, it's not like that now.

72.08 **SR: O.K. Well, I'd like to thank you for your time. It's been really good, thanks.**

Interview ends