

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

‘Millers Point Oral History Project’

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE:	Dawn Caruana
TAPE NUMBERS:	MP-FH I I
INTERVIEWER:	Frank HEIMANS
DATE AND PLACE:	2 August 2005 at Millers Point NSW
DURATION OF INTERVIEW:	59 mins 25 secs
RESTRICTIONS ON USE:	Nil

Note: The opinions expressed in this oral history interview are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily represent in whole or in part the position of the Department of Housing, the Government Architect's Office, the Department of Commerce or the Oral History Consultants.

00:06 START OF TAPE MP-FH I I SIDE A

00:07 Tape identification

Dawn, usually people, when they listen to the tape they want to know a little bit about the person what we are interviewing so can you tell me first what is your full name?

Dawn Marie Caruana.

What was your maiden name?

Marriott.

Where and when were you born?

00:48 I was born in Lismore on the North Coast in February 1945 at a hospital called Currandina, which was in the township of Lismore itself.

Tell me a little bit about your parents, the family you were born into?

01:10 My parents had a dairy farm and I lived on a dairy farm, we had five hundred acres and a lot of that was sort of swamp land. I worked on the farm until I was seventeen and then I went nursing in Lismore, began my nursing career at St Vincent's in Lismore. Mum and dad were on the farm, they moved to Alstonville which is a little township this side of Lismore when dad retired and sold the property and they lived there until they both died in 1985 and 1986 consecutively.

Was it mainly Alstonville that you grew up?

01:50 No I grew up at Meerschaum Vale, which was a little village out from Alstonville, that was the dairy farm it was called Meerschaum Vale.

How many cows were there?

We had sixty, we milked sixty cows, morning and night.

Did you help?

Oh yes.

From what age do you think?

Probably from the age of seven. Even when I went back from days off at nursing, if someone was sick I'd help out as well.

So you are an expert.

Yes, I am at milking.

Did the milk get pasteurised after the milking?

02:37 Yes it was sent to the Dairy Farmers Co-op in Lismore. We used to have the carrier who used to come and pick up the milk and the cream. We used to separate, we'd do our own separating, and then we'd send the milk and cream to Lismore and they pasteurise it

and what have you up there.

Was it a good living at the time for a dairy farmer?

02:56 It was at that time, but then later on it wasn't, I mean they weren't getting a lot of money, so that is when dad decided to sell up and sell the property. He wasn't very well either, so they sold the property and this guy from England bought it, he was a Lord Bacon. He was a Lord, back in history, he had quite a lot of property in Australia, and he bought our property. Richard Bacon, but he was Lord Bacon, as in a title.

Were you the only child or did you have brothers and sisters?

03:38 I was one of seven, I have got four brothers and two sisters. I was number three, I was the first girl after two boys, first daughter, number three.

Tell me a little bit about growing up on the dairy farm, what sort of things do you remember, what are some of your earliest memories?

04:10 I guess I had a little bit of responsibility being the eldest girl and having all the others as well, but we used to make our own fun and build cubby houses. I loved gardening, used to do a lot of gardening and things like that, we had a lovely garden. We used to make our own fun, I used to play cricket with my brothers, and mud pies, go for walks. It was healthy, when I look back, it was lovely, do bush walks and things like that. Really enjoyed it, really loved the country.

What was school like?

04:47 I went to primary at a little place called Bagotville, which was three miles, six kilometres, from where we lived. But my father got very ill and then I had to do correspondence, so I wasn't educated as such at a secondary school. I did my education through Blackfriars in Sydney here, correspondence school, and I got my Intermediate through there.

All of your secondary education was by correspondence but all the primary was at Bagotville. It is a bit hard doing it by correspondence, isn't it?

05:25 Incredibly hard, I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. It was very hard on mum too because she had to make sure I did it. I was never so relieved when that certificate came and I had passed my exam, that was really great news, that was the Intermediate. From there I went nursing, I went for an interview and thought I would do a nursing career.

What made you decide on nursing?

05:56 I don't know. I think I was dedicated right from the beginning, I was always putting band-aids on people, I always played nurses with the kids and things like that.

So you wanted to do something for the community, even though you didn't know it.

Possibly, yes.

Was there anything in your childhood that had a big influence on you, something that might have occurred?

06:40 No, not really I don't think, not in childhood. I can back to re-birthing if you want to, with my mother.

You left school at about fifteen, did you?

06:59 I had twelve months, I was working for twelve months on the farm. You couldn't go nursing until you were seventeen in those days and it was four years training, whereas now it is only three. I couldn't go until I was seventeen so I worked for twelve months. In the meantime my two elder brothers were at Woodlawn College, they were boarding there, so I was helping on the farm.

Where did you say you did your nursing training?

St Vincent's in Lismore.

Did you leave home then?

07:31 I was living on campus for four years but I'd come home on my days off.

So you became a nurse and got your certificate and all that, what happened after that?

-7:44 Then I came to Sydney because there were no job opportunities in Lismore, so I moved to Sydney and I was doing private nursing. I was staying with my brother for a while, he was at Dee Why and I did some nursing at the Spastics Centre at Allambie Heights. Then I worked at Cremorne in a nursing home, I was working there in Holt Avenue. Then I went to Chatswood and Mosman and I did part-time at Kirribilli Private Hospital. Then after that I got married, met my husband and got married and had a family.

Tell me about your husband, what is your husband's background?

08:34 He was born at Millers Point, he was second generation. His father was Maltese and his mother was half Scottish and half Irish so the three tempers started, but that was okay. He was a Foreman Stevedore. He went to Fort Street School here at Millers Point, did his schooling there, finished there and went on the waterfront. Sort of started as a wharfie and then a foreman and then a foreman supervisor with Patrick Stevedoring Company.

When you married him was he already a foreman?

He was a Foreman Stevedore.

What do they do?

09:20 I don't know, I think they are sort of one of the bosses, aren't they, they are in charge of the wharfies, I guess. I didn't know a lot about that sort of work but I guess that is what it would be.

So he worked his way up from being a wharfie. The occupations in Millers Point - were they mostly waterside workers or people connected with the waterfront?

Mostly in those days yes. Mostly shipping.

When you came to Millers Point the first time which year was that, that you came here?

I came in 1968.

What was it like in that time?

10:02 It was lovely, it was a little village. I mean it is still a little village to this day but it was very, very cute. I had just sort of met John then, my boyfriend I guess then, he said, 'You don't talk about anyone in this area because everyone is related.' I said, 'Is it a little bit like that is it?' He said, 'No, but you go back two or three generations and they have sort have all lived in little areas of rental homes around here.' I said, 'Okay, I know nothing,' and I didn't know anything.

He knew everybody did he?

10:39 Yes, and it is like that. I mean not that you sort of knew everyone, the mother and father, but you knew all their children by names and they knew they were connected with their parents, it was a big happy family.

What sort of things were there for the men in Millers Point to do, tell me a little bit about the life of the men here, for your husband, say?

11:11 I guess there was football, they had their football, they had their clubs in football and cricket. Tennis, there was a tennis court up here. Fishing, I used to go down to the Met Wharf and do a lot of fishing. They grew up, all the Millers Point boys fishing and swimming down at the Met Wharf and getting on mattresses, thought they were going to ride over to Kirribilli on mattresses. Things like that, I believe they did, growing up.

What was life like in the pubs for them?

There were six-thirty openers and they'd close at six o'clock at night so for the waterfront workers they were the earlier openers. Which was great, there was no problem, they all liked a drink. I don't think there was the problem there is now because of the early-openers and closing early at night. It was probably a catch twenty-two.

What sort of hours did your husband work? Was he on shift work?

12:14 Shift work yes. Used to do morning, twilight shift and the evening, which I think he

called the graveyard shift. No, I think that was the twilight, if I remember that was from three to eleven, or something like that. Then he'd do the night shift.

He'd come home at five in the morning sometimes, would he? What time would he come home from the night shift?

Usually about five or six in the morning and probably eleven if he did the twilight one.

Was he as a foreman also involved in unloading the ships or was he just supervising?

12:53 Just supervising, he would just supervise to make sure everything was okay and there were enough pallets and everything was there, I guess. I didn't really get involved.

What about life for you as a young wife when you came here?

13:13 I was nursing, I was doing part-time nursing, until I had my family and then I didn't work for a while. I didn't work until I had my second son and then he used to drive me crazy, so I had to go out and do a bit of part-time work. I'd do a shift and my husband would come home and look after him until I came home. I would do the twilight until eleven o'clock at night or something, so I'd do shift work as well, which worked in well for both of us.

You worked it out so that someone would be here to look after the kids.

13:46 Yes. That was just part-time, probably three days a week I was doing that. But then I got involved with a lot of the mothers with their children too. Once my children started going to kindergarten, which was Lance Kindergarten down here, I got to know the mothers and we developed a friendship and to this day I am still friends with the mothers. Some are still here some have moved away but I am still friends with them. Our kids have grown up with them and my daughter is still friends with the girls she went to school with at Lance Kindergarten. It is lovely to think they have got that bond, not a lot of people have that bond of twenty or thirty years, which is great.

What kind of things would the mothers do in the hours that their kids went to kindergarten? If they didn't work would they visit each other?

14:45 I don't think we socialised, not like a lot do today, I don't think we socialised a lot. I mean we went home and did our chores and there would be Melbourne Cup Days and things like that, you'd have special days or luncheons, but not every day. You would go shopping once a week and you might take a couple with you shopping or something like that. Then we'd meet of an afternoon, take our kids over to the little park there and give them an hour's run around before we'd bring them home for dinner at night.

Tell me what happened on Melbourne Cup Day - what did the mothers do?

15:25 Oh there were probably about ten of us and we'd have a ladies day, like we still do today. Sort of go out at eleven o'clock and come home at five, place your bets and have your lunch, have a few drinks. If you were a little bit late home the nuns would look after the kids for an extra half-an-hour, knowing that you were on your way home.

Now the first house you lived in at Millers Point - was it 21a Kent Street, can you describe it?

16:01 There was a couple of steps off the street, off the footpath, and you'd walk into a little foyer and then you'd go into a lounge room. Then you'd go through to the kitchen and we had an outside laundry and toilet and just a little courtyard. Upstairs there was four bedrooms and a bathroom and toilet upstairs.

A fairly big house with four bedrooms.

They weren't really big rooms, there were probably a couple, but the other two were very, very small rooms.

How were you able to get the house? Did you have to wait a long time for it?

16:44 Well my husband had it, because that was originally Maritime Services Board and he was living there. My husband was married before, was divorced and had two children, they were six and four. I reared those as well when I met my husband.

So a four bedroom house, what kind of age was the house? Do you know anything about the house itself, the history of it?

17:26 I'm not sure it would be as old as this one, but still under heritage. It was probably early 1900s I think, I am not sure.

Could be 1880s because this street is pretty old. What number is it?

17:45 It was 21A and why I am saying that, there was a photo where cattle were grazing on that block of land and the Lord Nelson Hotel was up but there was no building. The Lord Nelson is 1880 across the road and that is a photo from Observatory Hill. It had to be early 1900s, probably.

Did you enjoy living in the house?

I did, it was fun.

How long were you there in that particular house?

18:36 I was there from 1968 until fourteen years ago, 1968 to 1991, that would be right, I came up here in 1991.

So that is about twenty-one years. Now the first house you went in - what state was it in when you came, was it done up?

19:11 It was shocking, it was terrible, my husband did it all up, it was terrible. He was very

good with his hands and he did it all up and wallpapered it and we put a new kitchen in, put a toilet in upstairs. Actually when I was pregnant with my first child he did that. He redecorated it and it was lovely. It was very cheap rent with the Maritime Services Board, so you didn't mind spending money to do it up, it didn't worry you.

Were you worried about security of tenancy there because you knew they could ask you to move at any time, you weren't on a long lease were you?

No, didn't worry, if it happened it happened and if it didn't, it didn't. I guess if you had to move or had to go, well you'd do it and go somewhere.

Was there much dislocation among the people here, did they have to move frequently?

No it was pretty secure. Very secure with MSB.

What were they like as landlords generally?

20:15 Very good, well I had no problem, I am just speaking for myself, I had no problem and they were very good.

When you first came to 21A Kent Street can you tell me about the facilities in the house, did you have a gas stove, what kind of heating was it?

20:37 We had a very old gas stove. Heating, I have got to remember. I think we had both electric and gas. We had gas and that is why I always wanted gas when I came up here because I loved gas. It was one of the very old stoves, God, that was about forty years old, but it still cooked and was still a great stove.

Did the Maritime Services Board paint the house sometimes? Did they do any upkeep or maintenance?

Not really. I think when my husband wanted to paint it we painted it, or wallpapered it.

Do you remember anything about the neighbours, their names and who they were, what sort of occupations they had?

21:38 Yes. The little shop, which was the doctor's surgery, from which Dr Shearer just moved about six months ago, that was a little smallgoods place when I was there and the guy that ran that was called John Holly. He was lovely, he had a little grocery shop, smallgoods and he has been dead quite a few years now. The laundromat was always there and the milkbar was there, they were Greeks who owned the milkbar, lovely, they were there for years.

Remember their names?

22:28 George and John but I can't think of their surnames, off-hand.

So it was already becoming a multicultural community, what kind of ethnic groups were there in the area that you know of?

22:45 Probably Greeks, Italians, more Europeans. There were no Asians, to my knowledge. There was Chinese because there was a Chinese takeaway, there was a Chinese restaurant. English of course, Spanish.

Any other Maltese people?

23:20 No, not to my knowledge, except for the Caruanas. Aboriginals, sort of second, third generation.

Many Aborigines in the area?

No.

How would you describe the people and their occupations, were they working-class?

23:55 Working-class, they were all working-class, except for the professional people like the doctors and the chemist. There was a pharmacy underneath, John Butterworth had the pharmacy, which was on the corner where the convenience store is now, that was a pharmacy and he was there for about twenty-seven years, I think.

What about life for women, like entertainment? Did you go to the ladies' lounge in the pubs? What sort of thing would you do?

24:35 I think they did, I didn't, I wasn't a pub person but the women did. They used to go in their slippers and dressing-gown and things like that, there were some icons in the area. They'd go in from the time I was here, as to before I don't know, I don't think they stopped them, they would go up to the bar.

Would they share the same bar as the guys?

Yes, I don't think it worried them.

What was it like for safety, was there much crime in the area?

25:08 No, it was great, never had to worry, or ever did worry. Not like today, the kids would go out and you never worried about the boys. They'd go and have their game of cricket, or they'd play their game of football, went fishing, you knew they'd be home. You never had to think like you have to do today, with security. You'd get the drunks, you always get the drunks, but our kids grew up to respect them. Their backyard was the street and they learnt to respect these people.

Were there many drunks around?

25:55 You'd get probably two or three of the regulars but there was no druggies or anything like that in the early days, it was only the drunks.

You said you had six o'clock closing when you came here.

26:16 Probably not all of them, there were certain waterfront hotels, probably the ones up George Street were open longer hours, ten-thirty or eleven in those days.

The Palisade Hotel was a popular haunt, was it?

26:37 More the Lord Nelson, the Lord Nelson was very popular because I lived opposite and that was the early-opener, also the Palisade and the Cook, they were the three that were pretty popular in the area.

You didn't have much to do with them because you weren't a pub person?

27:00 No, I mean I had a drink at home but I wasn't one that got involved in that sort of thing, not that I was opposed to anyone else that did it, that was their thing.

Which school did you send your kids to after Lance Kindergarten?

27:17 They went to St Brigid's, which was the end of Kent Street, which was virtually adjacent to where I lived, and that went up to year three. That was a little Catholic school run by a nun called Sister Antoinette who is a hundred now and still living, she is up at Waitara at a nursing home. She taught my children, as well as another nun, Sister Maureen, who is now over at the Mater Hospital. I think the maximum was about twenty-three children. From year three they went to Marist Sacred Heart at Mosman. Then Christopher, the second boy went to Marist College at North Shore and my daughter went to St Scholasticus at Glebe.

Tell me a bit about Sister Antoinette, what sort of person was she?

28:24 She was beautiful. She was a very old-fashioned nun, very strict. Very kind and very loving, she was a beautiful person and a wonderful teacher.

28:53 END OF TAPE MP-FH I I SIDE A

28:55 START OF TAPE MP-FH I I SIDE B

So would the nuns have much interaction with the community, which way would they interact? Apart from teaching the kids did they take part in the religious services?

29:13 Oh they all did with the church and with the school, Sister Antoinette. Sister Maureen was more social, she'd come out when we had our ladies' days or nights, she would come out. She still comes out with us and she is included with us if we go out on the odd occasion, birthdays and things like that. Antoinette used to wear a habit, she never got out of a habit, she was one of the old school, whereas Maureen was in the skirt, times had changed and fashions had changed and rules had changed.

Kids, what did they do to entertain themselves? Did they go to picnics, Luna Park, out of school in the holidays?

30:08 If the parents didn't take them away on holidays there was always the King George V Playground up in Cumberland Street and that was absolutely wonderful in holiday time. They had programs right through the holidays, they'd go to the snow or they'd go on picnics or they'd go on hiking tours and things like that. They had a couple of supervisors and if the parents wanted to go they could as well. There was always something going on at the playground at King George. My kids often went because I couldn't always go away on holidays. I mean I would try to go up and see my mum and dad as often as I could on holidays but if I couldn't, my kids would go there, especially Christopher because boys used to love going camping and things like that. Water rafting, all that sort of thing.

Would the kids take a ferry somewhere round the Harbour if they had a few hours to spare? Would they go to Luna Park or that kind of stuff?

31:14 As they got older, because they didn't have to be supervised as they got older. A lot of them had their sport. They were very sport-orientated, as I said they had the tennis and the football was very popular.

Now a lot of the people in the community helped fundraising and there was a sort of support system, tell me about that from your point of view.

31:40 I did a lot of that. I did a lot of that with Lance Kindergarten, with St Brigid's, with both the schools. We had The Rocks Celebration, the annual event they used to have, we used to fundraise for that and make shish-kababs. We made about two thousand dollars, I think, fundraising. We made hamburgers as well. That was with The Rocks Celebration. Then with King George we fundraised for the children to go to New Zealand, all the kids used to collect cans, wherever we went they'd collect cans, and we fundraised for that. I took my daughter with a group of others to New Zealand in 1988 for netball against Papaya which is on the North Island, up near Cape Berringa (?), went over there for ten days.

That was nice for the kids, wasn't it.

Beautiful, lovely.

Was it hard work raising the funds?

32:57 We didn't look at as hard work, I mean it was fun and we enjoyed it, and you do those things. They had a goal and we achieved it, and it was great.

What sort of other things would the community do among themselves to further their own existence?

33:25 There would be raffles, we used to have chicken raffles in the pubs, used to make a

lot of money for schools with that. That was a community thing. We used to have a nun, Sister David, who was the social worker here and she used to visit, she used to come in and do daily visits to people in the area who were sick or the young, if you were home she'd pop in and say hello.

Who was Sister David, it is a strange name for a Sister, it is a man's name?

34:10 I don't know why she took David because they changed their names and she took David. She died a few years ago but she was wonderful. She was a social worker from St Patrick's and she'd come down to The Rocks and visit the elderly.

Sounds like a real community, a working community.

It was a working community, yes. You'd help out with babysitting and if anyone was sick and they didn't have any food you'd help out, just go and knock at the door and give them something to eat, things like that. Yes, it was a wonderful community spirit.

Now you had a fairly tragic episode in your life that happened - can you tell me about that?

34:52 In 1979 I lost my husband and son in a car accident. It was July the 13th, Black Friday. It was a Friday night and I didn't know until Saturday morning, until the police arrived. I knew as soon as they arrived, as soon as I looked out the window and saw the police car I knew straight away. I remember, I couldn't believe it, I just felt it was a dream. I don't remember much more then, just them grabbing me and holding me and I obviously went into shock and all that jazz. My husband had a heart attack and they went into a creek and my son was drowned, he was nine.

Your husband had a heart attack while driving?

Yes.

Where as that?

35:58 Down at Wongawilli, which is near Dapto, down the south coast. We had a beach house down at Shoalhaven Heads and they'd been down, my son wasn't very well so he didn't go to school on the Friday, so I thought he could go down with his father.

Did your husband have a history of heart condition?

He was a big man. He'd never had a heart attack, always was healthy.

You didn't know he had a heart condition at the time?

No.

What sort of support did the community give you at that time?

36:46 Oh they were wonderful, they were absolutely wonderful, I can never thank them

enough and never will be able to with what they did. My daughter was only fourteen months old and my other son was seven and of course he went ballistic. I couldn't even change a nappy so I had a sister down, she was from the north coast, and she stayed with me. My brother was down. But in between the St Brigid's mothers they all did a roster system, as babysitting and cooking. Until one day my family had to go home and that was terrible, I will never forget it, I thought God I've got to answer phones and I've got to answer the door and I didn't know how to do that, it was really bad but I worked through it. Probably with the help of St Patrick's and the nuns I had wonderful support, a lot of prayer, so I worked through it.

What do you think was the most valuable thing that you got at that time to help you through it all?

37:52 Probably strength, you get nowhere if you haven't got strength. I don't know how I got through, I don't know, it was just one day at a time. I knew I had a baby and I just had to look after her, I had to feed her. I had a seven year old who was a larrikin and the only way I could keep him off the streets was taking him to football on Saturday and backing up Sunday and he was ball boy for the Under Sixteen boys in the area and I just dragged my daughter along, fourteen months. So I just had to keep myself busy at weekends, which I did do, virtually a football scene all weekend.

Just to keep his mind off that he had lost his older brother, of course.

38:50 This went on and it was probably a couple of weeks after the funeral and then he started attacking me and I thought, I've got to get some help for him now. I had to take him to a psychologist every week for twelve months because I thought there was something wrong with him but he was frightened he was going to lose me and his sister and that is why he was launching out at me. So I had to go through that treatment every week, used to pick him up at Mosman Sacred Heart and then straight over to Surry Hills, every Thursday for twelve months.

Was he able to cope eventually?

39:29 He was okay. They said, 'It may come back in his secondary years,' which it did. When he was thirteen at Marist College I had trouble again over there in his teenage years but the Brothers were marvellous over there and sorted it. He is thirty-two now and I think there are times he still hasn't properly got over it, even with the counselling he has had he still has a few problems.

What about yourself, have you ever been able to get over it entirely?

40:01 I don't think you ever get over it, you live with it, you never get over the loss of a child.

And a husband.

40:10 And a husband. You just live with it. People come and say you are different, you have changed, and you think well, you are not the person you were. I thought what is different about me, would you be? You get a bit of a perspective in life.

Were you glad in a way that it happened while you were in Millers Point because it may not be as good in another place?

No didn't even think of that, it happened here and that was it, never thought that. Never thought of that for one minute, it happened and that was it.

How does the community cope with that kind of tragic event?

Well they were marvellous, had a lot of support for many years.

Now you moved houses after that, in about 1991, why did you have to move?

41:14 Well they asked me did I want to move and I said no because I felt I didn't want to move, because the children had had enough, emotionally. When they grew up I'd make a decision, but I didn't want to put them through any more added emotions. They came back and said, 'Well you'll have to move because this house is going to go commercial.' They would re-house me in or out of the area wherever I wanted to go and I said, 'Well I prefer to stay here because the children are still being educated and I don't want to take them away from that.' There were times I really wanted to run away, I wanted to run away, but I had to think of the kids. That is when I got this place.

Did it actually go commercial?

42:09 No I didn't. They came back a week after I moved in here and said, 'You can go back, it is not going to go commercial now,' and I said, 'Well sorry, I've had boxes packed for six months and I am in here now and no way am I going back.'

When you compare the two houses which one do you like the most?

42:32 This is lovely because I have got a yard and I always said to my daughter if I had a yard I'd get her a cat, which I did until three years ago when she was eleven she died. I love my garden, I love outdoors, but there was a lot of lovely memories in the other place as well with growing up, and a lot of sadness. So there was a balance but here it is happy and I feel great and I started a new life here, a new beginning.

What condition was the house in that you live in now, 125 Kent Street, when you first moved in?

43:09 Oh they did it all up, it was the way it is now, they did it all up. It was full of white

ants and they had to gut it, except for wanting to paint over the sandstone and all the rest of it. There were only a couple of trees and I went mad and started planting all my trees out there and did the garden bit.

The garden looks really nice.

Yes, that's mine.

What else have you done to the house since you moved in here, anything at all?

43:42 The kitchen. My son was kind enough to give me a kitchen last year for my birthday, my birthday present. No, not really, I've painted it, or my son has, he has been very good to me. He has sort of touched it up that way and done all that sort of thing but I haven't really asked the Department. I mean if there is any maintenance the Department will come and do it but if you want to do something why not do it yourself.

You have made a very lovely place here. You came home one night in about 1980 and you had a big surprise, can you tell me what that was? You saw a big sign on your balcony.

44:32 That was the 'For Sale' sign, that was Easter weekend. I didn't have any idea what was happening, so a few ring arounds.

Can you start the story from the beginning to tell me exactly what happened?

44:54 Well I was out and came home and saw the 'For Sale' sign on my building. I guess I went into state of shock, it was a Good Friday or Easter Saturday, I thought how dare anyone get up and put a sign up like this while I'm away? So I did a ring around and what have you, and eventually on the Monday got on to Frank Sartor, who was the Lord Mayor at the time, asked him what was happening. It was in Greiner's time, it was Nick Greiner, it would have been Sartor, I think. We got onto the unions and we rang the media. Apparently the government wanted to sell it all off and didn't let anyone know, there was no knowledge of it at that time.

Was it just your house that was for sale or was it the whole street?

45:55 It wasn't the whole street. Mine was the only one that had the 'For Sale' sign but there were other houses across the road they wanted to sell as well. It was virtually my whole block they wanted to sell at that time, but I just had the 'For Sale' up. I found out later it was across the road and that was the other little slip I had with this old lady's photo, Mrs Agar, she was an icon in the area, she used to walk around with a pram with bottles in it and pick bottles up, she was the bottle lady, and she was a long-time resident.

Now this is the first house you lived in, in Kent Street, 21A. They hadn't told you anything at all about their plans to sell the house?

46:41 Not a word, nothing. We got the media down, Channel 9, Channel 7, Channel 2 and all the unions. On the park we had a meeting and we won.

What did the government say when they saw all this media publicity?

47:09 Well they weren't very impressed, they weren't very happy, it is called people power, isn't it. I thought once this goes the whole of Millers Point is going to go, how dare you do this, there will be no history at all. The residents were totally opposed to it, which you can't blame them.

Especially when you weren't consulted before that they were going to sell.

Not a word. The first indication was the 'For Sale' sign. They got up on my balcony and put the 'For Sale' sign up.

Without asking permission or nothing?

47:46 Not a word, not a word. I thought that was very snaky, very deceitful and if they are going to be this deceitful what else are they going to do?

Do you know what their plans were, selling to whom, or for what?

Had no idea at that stage, all we knew was they wanted to sell the whole area, and this was the beginning.

It was only ten years earlier that the Green Bans were on in The Rocks so did you think that Millers Point was next?

48:18 I thought this was the beginning, I thought this was going to happen. We didn't even get to the bulldozer stage and all that, the unions were marvellous, they just walked off. They just came and joined us and said how dare they do that. We had the Waterside, which is the strongest union of all. I think the only one we were waiting on was the Airport because that was going to be a close down, so the whole city would have just stopped, so it was really, really powerful stuff. There was hundreds of people in that park so it was great. From what I can remember because I was still sort of numb, in the 1980s it took me a long time to work through my grief. It was in the 1980s, I am not sure what year, I can't remember.

Was it during Nick Greiner's term as premier?

49:20 I am sure it is on one of those slips of paper, 1988, 1989. These were a couple of the old people who have since died. What date is on that one?

1989, April 8th.

49:46 That was about Easter. It probably would have been the late 1980s. This is during the

Greiner period, Greiner was in. This is the write-up.

'Old Sydney's Last Stand', Millers Point. This is Easter 1989.

It was the late 1980s.

Did Shirley Ball get involved in that as well?

50:47 Oh yes. She was everything, Shirley, but good on her, she was great. You either loved or hated Shirley, I mean a lot of people will say that, but I got on well with Shirl and she was a rock, she was wonderful.

She was fighting her own battle at the time against the time because they were trying to take away the head tenants' leases.

Lower Fort Street. She was involved with the whole area, she didn't want it to go either.

Did you take part in Resident Action Group meetings about this issue?

51:30 I wasn't on the Board of Directors then but I used to go to their meetings.

You have lived now in this address here since 1991, fourteen years, tell me about life here on this particular spot.

51:54 Possibly much quieter than what it was down at 21A because we had the hotel across and that used to get incredibly busy. I remember taking the Lord Nelson to court, did I tell you that? I was trying to think what year that was now. It was just absolutely unbelievable at times with the noise and this would go on until eleven o'clock at night and I couldn't listen to television or anything. We decided with the Local Council to take them to court and we won our case. I mean it was a residential area and they had to respect the residents and they had to glaze the windows.

So the pub was still open at eleven o'clock at night?

52:49 I think it was ten-thirty, eleven at night, that was then. That would have been the 1980s.

You actually took the pub to court.

52:58 I was one of the key witnesses, I sat in the witness stand, with knees like jelly, I might add. I remember the QC questioning me and he got up and they confuse you and swing the stories around, 'How many children, I thought you only had two,' and all the rest of it. He said, 'You are saying the noise wakes you up in the middle of the night, can you prove that?' I just said, 'Well my daughter is woken up at midnight with the noise, with the patrons coming out of the hotel and throwing pumpkins on the door and yahooing,' and it was true, it was true. He just couldn't answer me and the people in the court were clapping hands. We had to do something, there was about seven residents, I think took them to

court. So that sort of quietened it down and shut them up and all the rest of it at that time. No, it is much quieter up here. You still get the larrikins and things like that. If anything the traffic has increased along Kent Street, naturally, so it is a bit noisier, but downstairs here is very quiet.

How much has Millers Point changed since the time you first came in 1968, over the last thirty-seven years you have been here?

54:44 Very much so. You haven't got the community spirit like you used to because a lot of the people that are coming into the area are not interested, they are too busy doing their own thing. It is like anything you are involved in, you get the same people all the time that do the same things, the others are all talk but they don't want to do anything, but that is okay too.

Now Dawn, looking at your whole life as a whole, do you think fate has played a part in your life?

55:27 Well fate is fate, isn't it, it is a way of life, we have got no control over our lives and no control over our destiny so we have just got to accept what comes gracefully, I guess. Sometimes it is a little bit hard to handle but out of everything bad comes something good. *Do you think you are a different person for having lived at Millers Point rather than in some other suburb of Sydney, has it made you any different?*

56:09 I guess I couldn't compare that because when I first came to Sydney from the country I was at Cremorne for a little while, while I was nursing, but I was busy working then, I wasn't a mother or didn't have a family life. No, I don't know. I don't think I could live in suburbia myself now, I think when you have lived in the inner-city it is either that or country for me, one or the other. I don't know, that is just how I feel because you are closely involved. I still think there is community spirit in the suburbs as well.

Why is Millers Point special for you?

57:10 I think it's the history of it. I love history and it is a feeling. It is the old and the special part of it, I think. There is something special and probably I haven't got an answer for that. It is a feeling wherever you walk around - you haven't got that feeling if you go to a suburb, or anything like that, it is probably the oldness and the history of it.

Do you feel that you truly belong here, that you are one of the people of the place?

57:50 I do now but it took a while before people accepted me. If I've got to move on, if I've got to go, that is life, that is my destiny. What can I do about it? I can't sit here and say I'm not going to move, I'm going to stay, I'd love to do that, we all say that.

Do you think you will secure here now for the foreseeable future?

I hope so but who knows, may not be. They might come over next week, they will never sell the place, it is heritage, and say, 'You've got to move, you've got to go,' which would be a very sad moment if I had to do that.

Could you live anywhere else?

58:33 Well I'd have to. We are all survivors and whatever we have to do to survive, we do, and that is nothing to what I have been through. I'd hate to move, I think, just with the character and the love it has got here.

We have come to the end of our interview - is there anything else you want to say?

No not really just thank you very much for interviewing me, it has been my pleasure. Only too pleased to help you.

Thank you for taking part in the interview series.

59:26 END OF INTERVIEW WITH DAWN CARUANA AND END OF TAPE MP-FH I I SIDE B