CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ALEXANDRIA

Name: Robert Hammond

Date: 21 January 1995

Place: Bass Hill

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

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TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR: 21st of February 1995 at Bass Hill.**

Bob, what year were you born in?

RH: 27th of January 1927.

SR: And where were you born?

RH: In Alexandria. Our address was 30 Alexander Street, Alexandria.

SR: And you grew up in Alexandria, did you?

RH: Yes, I spent practically all my life there until I got here, yes.

SR: Did you have brothers and sisters?

RH: Yes. There's four boys, which two deceased, one in 1937 and the other about '85, and I've got eight sisters.

SR: Gosh.

RH: So we're a big family.

SR: And where were you, what position were you in the family?

RH: Number one; I'm the oldest.

SR: And what kind of a house did you live in?

RH: A double-storey house, yes.

SR: Brick?

RH: Yes, all brick, yes.

SR: Was it a terrace?

RH: They were terrace houses, only there was one peculiar thing in the street on our side was they started off with our double-storey place, a cottage and then about five double-storey places and then another cottage between street to street. It's a bit unusual putting a cottage in there. Must have run out of material then.

SR: Is the house still there?

RH: Yes. Yes, actually we only sold it last year and the renovators come in and they done it all up and I tell you what it's really nice, it really looks good.

2.02 I didn't recognise the place when I saw it and it was quite an achievement because we had a little brick alcove there in the kitchen that had the stove in it there. They took all the bricks away and got them sandblasted and everything and made them like a feature finish in the kitchen of it and I suppose mum lived there for about sixty seven years and there was people in there so it has to be getting near a hundred year old, them bricks, and it really finished – I couldn't believe it when I seen it. And you're wondering how all us kids got in there together?

SR: Yes, and how many bedrooms in the place?

RH: All doubled up. About three bedrooms.

SR: Three bedrooms?

RH: Yes.

SR: Gosh.

RH: So mainly all the girls are upstairs and they could fit about three or four beds around and the boys were downstairs in the front room, the front bedroom. Mum and dad had the top floor overlooking the balcony. So we managed, we managed, I suppose like a lot of other people in the area.

SR: And what kind of a kid were you?

RH: Good. No, I tried to be good as possible. We was taught by our parents, you know, that that was the go. My father, although he was fair but he wouldn't stand any cheek or wrongdoings or interfering with any other person or anything like that so he was very strict on that side.

SR: What did he do for a living?

RH: Actually, first of all when I got to know a little bit about it he worked at Foster Clark's over at Thurlow Street Redfern. They used to make custard powders and soups and that was off Bourke Street, Thurlow Street. And then he was there for a number of years and then the Depression hit and he was out of work for a fair while and then the war started and he went onto the waterfront where he served for about forty eight years. Actually, he's got a life membership card of the

Sydney Waterside Workers Federation but he's dead now, of course – he died three years ago. Me mum's still alive. She's in a nursing home up at Redfern on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Redfern Street; she's still there and she'll be eighty nine in May.

SR: Goodness. And was she from that area?

RH: No, she come from The Rocks, mum was born in The Rocks and her father was a coal lumper. He used to be called out all time of morning, early morning, nights to put the coal back onto the ships to get them ready to sail and, yes, and the house that mum was born in in Harrington Street is still there, actually. And my father, he come from Tamworth and when they come to Sydney I'm not quite sure where their first house but it was in Paddington. I think it was down near the White City area somewhere, I think, but anyhow it was in the Paddington area; that's where they were domiciled, all his family.

6.10 **SR: Well, what sort of a family was it? Were you well-off?**

RH: No, no. No, it was sort of day to day living although we was never short of clothes or food or things like that but it was a very shaky ending at the end of the week; it was very limited on things.

SR: Was he out of work for long in the Depression?

RH: He was but the actual time I'm not sure, I'm not real sure because they used to get a bit of work on these relief work on road gangs and things like this. And then apparently they used to get these dole coupons – well, it wasn't dole coupons but you get relief coupons for food, not like they do today for money, they get it for food and that was at least it kept you and the family fed. But we was never really destitute for food; we seemed to always have a meal there.

SR: Did your mum work?

RH: No, no, mum never, ever worked.

SR: Well, what sort of a man was your father, how would you describe him?

RH: He liked to talk and he was pretty strict but he was fair with it provided you done the right thing. Of course, naturally as I said before we was taught that way.

8.10 **SR: And what about your mother, what was she like, how would you describe her?**

RH: Mum was a real charmer. If dad whacked us, well, she'd console us.

SR: Yes.

RH: Yes, she's still the same. She was a very gentle person, my mother, and so was her two sisters. She had two sisters and they were very gentle people.

SR: And who was the boss in the family?

RH: Apart from me? No, my father.

SR: Your father?

RH: Yes. He ruled the roost, yes.

SR: What happened to his wage packet?

RH: Well, as far as I know it went into the house and I know that he might have had a couple of beers or something like that but I can't remember any squandering of money that way.

SR: How would you describe your mother's working day? Do you know like what time she'd get up and what she would do?

RH: Yes. They used to rise about six o'clock, I suppose, of a morning and, of course, it was a full day with a house full of kids and washing and all sorts of things and going right through the day I don't suppose she got a break till after the mealtime, you know, the night meal. I don't suppose she got a break till about seven thirty or eight o'clock so it was a pretty full day for her.

SR: Did you own the house then or were you renting it?

RH: No, renting, yes.

SR: And then you eventually bought it?

RH: Yes, yes.

10.00 **SR: Was your mother responsible for the budgeting?**

RH: Yes, yes. Yes, she used to be responsible for that side of it.

SR: Most women seemed to when you talk to people.

RH: Yes, yes. From what I can ascertain of the families living around us and opposite I know that there used to be a lot of women that used to do mostly all the budgeting, shopping and things like that.

SR: Well, what was a typical meal? Would you have your main meal at the end of the day?

RH: Yes. There was a lot of boiled meat in them sort of days, you know, like the leeks and corned beef and things like that. I think cabbage was always on the menu because by virtue of the fact I think it was the cheapest vegetable apart from potatoes but it seemed to be cabbage was always on the menu.

SR: Did you have dessert?

RH: No, not often. No, it wasn't an every night occasion. You know, might get ice cream every now and then but it wasn't an every night occasion.

SR: And would your father have a cooked breakfast before he went to work?

RH: No, no. I think it might have been just toast, tea. I can't recall him having many cooked breakfasts, if he did have.

SR: And you know the shopping that was done. Did you have a fridge or anything like that?

RH: No, there was only all little ice boxes in them days. They used to put the block of ice in the top in that little area, just about two shelves. They weren't very high either but, of course, there was never much over from the mealtime to stick anything in there, only maybe the butter. You never heard of margarine in them days, butter, and if there's a bit of meat left over there wouldn't be much. Milk, that'd be all.

12.12 **SR: So would people mostly shop virtually on a daily basis for the meals? Like you know how these days people shop for a week or two weeks and put it in the freezer and what have you, what was it like in those days in terms of stocking a house?**

RH: Well, I'd be sent around in Mitchell Road in Alexandria. The Scotts had a store 'round there, people by the name of Scott and I had to go 'round there and get what they used to call a pat of butter - I don't know what that was, only about a quarter of a pound - and a quarter of a pound of tea and a loaf of bread, you know, things like that and none of this buying all quiches and all this ice creams and anything like that. Never even seen that, didn't know what they were.

SR: And people would mostly shop locally?

RH: Yes. I'll reiterate on that. On the Friday night there used to be a place in Botany Road Alexandria called Buttles[?], S.R. Buttles. They were a big store, like a warehouse store but they had this shop in there up in Botany Road and mum'd go up there and buy her groceries there, of course, as I said these relief coupons at a particular time because they're not like money handout, it was only food, to make sure that you got the food.

SR: At home were your parents religious?

RH: Yes. Actually, we had to go to Sunday school every Sunday and if we didn't come home with our little card God help us, you know.

14.06 **SR: Yes?**

RH: Yes. Our little local church school was just up in Mitchell Road not very far.

SR: What was that called?

RH: I think from memory it was just a Sydney Mission Sunday school; that's all I can remember it being called. And there was a big lump of a chap there that used to be the minister – his name was Mr Colcher[?]. And then on occasions I'd get railroaded up to St Mary's School which was all Catholics up at Erskineville, sometimes Mount Carmel at Waterloo, very occasionally but.

SR: Who took you there?

RH: Miss Skinner, she used to do the class bible lessons and teaching at school because in them days you always had a session, just religious lessons.

SR: At the state school?

RH: Yes, yes.

SR: And, what, she attempted to convert you to Catholicism?

RH: Well, attempted, I suppose you could say that. I mean I believe myself. I mean I don't go to church to spread it around but I'm a believer of the faith myself but I don't think you necessarily have to go to church and St Mary's Cathedral just to preach it; I'm sure you can do it in your home. They say God's everywhere, so.

16.07 **SR: Did your parents ever talk politics, were they politically active?**

RH: No, no.

SR: And you never heard them even just talking about politicians?

RH: No. The only conversation that ever popped up was the Labor candidate because there was no Liberals or these Democrats or any of these.

SR: And did they support Labor?

RH: I think they did, yes. I wasn't sure about their voting episodes in them days but I'm sure that they did vote Labor, yes.

SR: And they never got involved in election campaigns or anything?

RH: No, no, they weren't that way inclined, no.

SR: Did your father get involved in the union? I mean the wharfies [wharf labourers' union] were pretty big.

RH: Actively involved?

SR: Yes.

RH: No. Might have been a delegate on that particular ship at that particular time but involved with the hierarchy and Sussex Street, no, no. But he would go there quite a bit to Sussex Street because that was their union rooms and that was their meeting rooms and then possibly they'd call a meeting and be debating something. And I used to go there myself when I worked on the wharves. You know, I used to go up there and just see what was going on.

SR: Was it a good union?

RH: I thought it was a very good union. They used to call it, naturally, the Communistic union but as far as getting things for the men and because there's no two ways about it, the shipowners would have just stood right over you, would have trampled you into the ground.

18.03 And they were wealthy shipowners. I'm talking about the P&O and Adelaide Steamship Company, Steamship and the wharfies, them union people they done a lot for the wharfie himself.

SR: It's pretty dangerous work.

RH: It was very dangerous work. You know, if you didn't have your wits about you there you could be in a hell of a lot of trouble and that's why all these conditions come in because in what they used to call the

"bull" days they used to be rushing and tearing around. There was a lot of men killed and it had to stop because, as I say, they were just walking all over men and I thought it was a very good union, actually.

SR: Your father started working there towards the end of the '30s, wasn't it, when the war came on?

RH: Yes. It'd be possibly late '30s, early '40s, I'd say.

SR: And how did the Depression affect your family – can you remember the impact that it had?

RH: Only that it made things a little harder, you know, it was a day to day proposition. You used to have to depend on, as I said, the dole – I don't know what they called it in them days - the relief coupons and you'd go down to Circular Quay and you'd get fitted out with a pair of pants and a shirt and squeaky boots and things like that. You just couldn't buy, never had the money to buy anything like this, especially a big family.

20.06 **SR: And was it like that for most families in the neighbourhood?**

RH: I'd say so, yes, yes. They'd be all struggling, yes.

SR: And what about the war? What can you remember about World War II and the outbreak of the war?

RH: Not much, really, about the outbreak of the war. The thing that I remember was my Uncle Claude and my Uncle Bob, they went and joined up or were called up because pre-war they used to be in the Volunteer Light Horse Brigade and I think that what happened, you know, they were looking for people that had pre-war knowledge of army and things like this and they were the first to be grabbed because one of them finished up a sergeant and the other one was a warrant officer.

SR: And they both survived?

RH: Yes. One of them's still alive, my Uncle Bob. My Uncle Claude died quite a few years ago because he had a bad time of it in the prisoner of war in Germany and that.

SR: What was it like at Sydney as a kid during the wartime, can you remember what it was like?

RH: Yes. I thought it was very good when Americans come here.

SR: Yes?

RH: Yes, I thought it was great. Well, kids used to get around the town or where the Yanks were and they'd get cigarettes off them. I didn't smoke then but a couple of my mates did. They used to get cigarettes off them and chewing gum and all sorts of luxuries and it was good and something different, the Americans, especially so many different like army, navy and marines, things like that, and apparently all the girls liked them too.

22.29 **SR: Can you remember when the Japanese got into the harbour?**

RH: Yes. Actually, I was coming home from Newtown one night and of course it was dark – you know, the blackouts and that was on – and I was walking down Henderson Road right in front of me I could see all these bright lights and everything going up and I thought "Someone's having fireworks on" or something and I thought to myself "That can't be fireworks because of the blackout and things like this" and, of course, I just looked at it in amazement to see how the white and blue and little red twirling and I thought "Oh, that's all right" and I didn't think any more of it until the next day when there was a hell of a scatter on with the Japs been bombing Coogee and Bondi or something. And then we was very close to Alexandria goods yards then and, of course there was a lot of activity with the army using the railways and trains. Then over at Moore Park they had the barracks there and Showground, all along there.

SR: I didn't know that.

RH: Yes. The Showground was one of the first places you had to go to when you was called up and when I went into the army there - that was the latter part of the year, I mean the war was practically over then but they still called us up – that was like the distribution centre, the Showground.

24.22 But where Moore Park Golf Course is now they used to have army stationed there, barracks. Randwick Racecourse, I think they had Americans there and we used to get these tanks and cars coming down Mitchell Road past our street to go into the trains, most probably send them up the country somewhere or wherever they used to send them.

SR: North.

RH: Most probably. Darwin, most probably Brisbane, them places but there used to be a lot of activity there at that particular time.

SR: I think they were manufacturing armaments, probably, at the Eveleigh Workshops.

RH: That was twenty four hour work there because I remember there was always people going past and carrying their bags and that and you'd know they'd be going over to Eveleigh so I think it was a twenty four hour job over there. I didn't know that but apparently they must have been doing something because they were set up with all the machinery, naturally. And I think there was Metters down the road and Hadfield's. I think they used to be in the war effort too because they were very big engineering firms too. I don't know whether you remember the old Metters stoves.

SR: Yes.

RH: Yes. Well, that was the mob, yes. Around the Alexandria area there was heaps and heaps of engineering places and that. God, I can name hundreds of them 'round there.

SR: Yes?

RH: Yes. Not too many now but it was all industry around Alexandria in them days.

SR: It would have been a target one would think.

RH: It would have been a very big target.

SR: Were people worried about that?

RH: I suppose deep down. I didn't hear them talking about it much because I think, well, it wasn't on their doorstep. It was over in the Middle East and then it started up in the islands. I suppose if it got any closer they'd have plenty to talk about, there'd be a bit of alarm going on.

SR: Was there ever an atmosphere of fear or worry? What was the atmosphere at that time?

RH: I can never recall anyone actually talking in the home or saying to me that they were scared stiff if the Japs or Germans ever got down here. I think that the proud thing about Australians in them days is that they were very, very safe with our blokes because they were very, very Australian and they knew our blokes wouldn't fail because that was the atmosphere that come across to me, that "Our boys are going to clean 'em up. Don't worry about it" so I think that was the attitude a lot of people took.

SR: Right. And I guess things would have lightened up a bit after the Depression because in the Depression nobody had any money and no work.

RH: Well, that's right. Everyone got into employment then and it wasn't hard to get a job but the Manpower was in; you know, if you went to work you had to stop there. You just couldn't go "I don't like this job" because they just put you into the Manpower then and they'd be out on you like a tonne of bricks because you had a Manpower card, you know, and if you didn't start the job - - -

28.26 **SR: You're in trouble?**

RH: My word you were, yes. And it come under the Defence Act too, which I believe made it worse; stand you against the wall and shoot you.

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

RH: Strict, strict enough. I mean we was allowed to talk and things like that but if we was told to do something, well, you'd better do it.

SR: O.K. And if you didn't what happened?

RH: You'd get a whack, you'd get a smack, yes. None of this vicious thing, smacking you across the head or things like that; our family's never held for that business. You'd get a slap on the bottom and made do it and go and stand in the corner. They might delay your evening meal for maybe half an hour or so and that used to bring the hunger pains back starting again.

SR: O.K, you were born in 1927 so by 1935 you would have been say eight. Were you expected as an eight, ten, twelve year old to contribute to the family if you could by, I don't know, selling newspapers or scrounging bottles or whatever kids could do in those days to raise money?

30.02 RH: Well, I used to do two milk runs in them days, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, so I used to go in a milk run, I used to help. Billy Tyee[?] used to knock me up about midnight and go and pick the milk up and do the milk run till about half past six all around Redfern and Waterloo and Alexandria, all them places, and then I'd come and have a bit of breakfast and away I'd go to school.

SR: Gee.

RH: And then after school I used to go down to another milk fella, Ben Furey and I used to do the afternoon run with him.

SR: How old were you?

RH: About ten.

SR: And you're working from midnight to six?

RH: Yes, yes.

SR: God, must have been tough.

RH: Yes. When I finished on the milk carts my father had bought or leased a wood and coal and ice run off another chap in Alexandria – this is before he went on the wars.

SR: And who'd he lease it from?

RH: A chap by the name of Georgie Squires - he lived down in Belmont Street Alexandria. And I used to help him on the wood and coal and ice and then my afternoon used to be taken up by going up to Alexandria goods yards and bagging hundredweight bags of coal out of these S[?] trucks. I used to get a princely sum of all that of about ten shillings then.

32.07 **SR: From your dad?**

RH: Well, from the milk run and I'd put that into my mother and she'd give me a shilling back or something and I'd be able to go to the pictures on a Saturday night, that's if I got home early enough, and things like this. So I contributed a little bit in my time.

SR: Yes, you must have done. And how did you do at school?

RH: Well, I managed to get through the grades but in them days sixth class you got kicked out of school because there was none of these high schools and TAFE courses or anything like this. It was only colleges and no one could afford to send anyone to college around our way.

SR: So you left after sixth class?

RH: So sixth class, yes, you'd be 'round about the fourteen mark so that was it.

SR: Gee. But from ten, working those hours is very long.

RH: No, it was earlier than that. I started 'round about eight, when I was eight years.

SR: What, working from midnight?

RH: Yes.

SR: Gee. And was that when that was delivered with a horse pulling the thing and they used to just ladle out the milk?

RH: Yes, that's right. Yes, the horse and cart, yes, and they had the two tanks inside and you know the pint measures or the quart measure, whatever, and the women used to have them little frilly milk covers on with the beads on them. You'd have to make sure they was on, otherwise the cat would have licked the milk and dust'd flow into it, all sorts of things.

SR: Did your other brothers and sisters work as well?

RH: Not at that early age, no. Maybe helped at home but not manual work.

34.03 **SR: Did your father like his employment? You know early on he was at Foster Clark's and then later on in the war, was he happy there?**

RH: My father always, always seemed to like his work for the simple reason because he used to leave early enough to go to them so I don't know whether it was the obligation of the family or that he loved to do it himself combined with the obligation to the family too, I suppose, because they were the only breadwinners in them days as the saying goes.

SR: Were they happy, was the family a happy sort of family?

RH: Oh, yes, yes. You'd always get your little squabbles between brothers and sisters and sisters and brothers. It happens in the best of regulated families, I'd say, but nothing vicious or things like that. A couple of me sisters used to have a take-to on occasions but everyone'd come out O.K. about it.

SR: Did the family do things for fun like together as a family or was it just too big?

RH: No. Mum and dad used to pack us up and we used to go out to Bronte a lot out there because the area was good for swimming and it had a big park area. I don't know whether you know Bronte at all but the green, the grass, and there's plenty of huts and things like that and the trams used to go right to the beach.

SR: Would you do that on a Sunday, would you?

RH: Yes, yes, we used to do that quite a bit, actually. Actually, it was only about maybe eight to ten years that they've stopped doing it because my mother and my sisters and that still used to go down there just for a family day out. I never made it on occasions because it was like a day's work going from here down to Bronte.

36.22 **SR: Yes, it's quite a way.**

RH: Yes.

SR: I wanted to ask you about variety of fruits and vegetables that were available. Was there much variety?

RH: Yes, but you never got much fruit in them days. You might get your ha'penny [halfpenny] or a penny and go and buy – because you'd get an apple about that big then. You could eat half in the morning and half in the afternoon. Just at the goods yards there they used to have what they called a horse dock they used to bring in the horses in them days. Race horses nowadays are floated nearly everywhere now and Menangle used to be a racecourse and Hawkesbury and they used to go out by train. Us kids, a bit after dark in the winter about six o'clock we'd know the horse trainer'd be coming in back from the races and if the owners and trainers had a good day they'd have a handful of pennies and throw out to you. And then we used to go through the train and collect the beer bottles. We'd get a ha'penny on them down at the local bottle merchant and, of course, that was a bit of sustenance to buy ice cream or a bit of fruit or something like that. Yes, so they were the good days, I used to like them.

38.02 I loved everything I done in Alexandria, actually, loved every bit of it. I had no regrets one iota because there was a lot of variety and there was a lot of different people you could talk to and there was always the local characters.

SR: Who were some of the local characters?

RH: We had one fella there we used to call 'Lum the Bum' and he lost his leg, the right leg, in the First World War and he must've been getting a small pension or something for that because he could always afford to buy methylated spirits and a bottle of orange drink because he used to do ……. He used to send whatever kid he could find to go over and get him a bottle of methylated spirits at a local shop and he'd tip half the orange drink out in the gutter and then put the metho in it, you know, and shake her up so it must have been a good cocktail; he used to enjoy it. And then a fella used to come around, we used to call him 'Knock Knock' because he used to tell you all them knock knock

jokes, you know, “Knock, knock”, “Who’s there?” and he was a funny little fella.

SR: And where did he live?

RH: Don't know. Lum, we thought, come from Redfern but Knock Knock, some used to say that he had money and he’s well-to-do and thing like that, he’s a bit eccentric but I don’t know.

SR: Were there any other local characters?

RH: They're the ones that stood out, the two that stood out. And there’s another fella, Alfie Oakes[?], he used to talk a bit funny and there was a lot of mimicking, mocking going on in them days with some of the local larrikins. Well, I didn’t hold to that myself because I thought it wasn’t very nice. He had an impediment in his speech and they used to mock him.

40.25 **SR: Were there people around that had had bad experiences in the First World War?**

RH: No, not that I know of, not in our area, not that I know of. There could have been but not that I really know of.

SR: Were there a lot of kids in the neighbourhood?

RH: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, never any worry about someone to play with.

SR: Were most of the families large like yours?

RH: Well, yes. Maybe not quite as large but they'd range from, you know, eight, nine, ten, seven. It was quite big families.

SR: Well, who were your friends?

RH: One of me good mates, he lived down the road, was Billy Markham(?). He’s dead now; he had cancer and died. And his family, the Markham family, is very good friends of mine - they lived in Alexandria Street. And then there was the Davises lived on the other side; they were good friends of mine, all the boys and that. And then further down was me little mate, Mickey Kelly and Ronnie Wagner [?] on the other side, there was quite a few. That’s just in that street but they were ‘round the next street further along.

42.02 **SR: What would you do when you were with your mates?**

RH: We used to - like sometimes you see it in television the old tin and old bit of wood, made a bat out of it and a tennis ball and played cricket.

SR: Where would you play?

RH: In the street. No chance of getting run over because there was no vehicles or anything 'round in them days. And across from our place there was only a little paddock – we used to call it Baldie Miller's paddock because he had horses, he used to leave his horses there and there was a nice little dirt track over there. We used to go over there playing marbles. We used to keep ourselves occupied.

SR: Would you roam very far? How far would you go?

RH: No, not really. Maybe Alexandria Park which is only a couple of blocks away and that'd be about as far as we'd go.

SR: Did you ever go over to the airport?

RH: Yes, did on a couple of occasions, yes. Of course in the war years, of course when the war broke out that was a taboo place, you couldn't get within cooee of it. But there used to be a railway line run pretty close along there and we could go up the bank and stand on the railway line because it was only a goods track along there and we could see all over the Bankstown Airport.

SR: You mean Mascot, don't you?

RH: Mascot, Mascot. So close to living in Bankstown – Mascot. And, yes, and when the war started we used to watch the planes coming in, the fighters and the bombers and things like that and it was very busy at particular times.

44.10 **SR: Can you remember anything going on at the Alexandria Canal?**

RH: Yes. We used to have boat races down there, yes.

SR: Kids or adults?

RH: Well, the adults used to take over, they were the main ones, but I think they used to railroad us kids if you had a little boat going in there because they all had names and numbers and everything. They'd bet on them, the elders, you know, they'd bet on them.

SR: That was pretty big on a Sunday, I heard.

RH: Oh, God, that was a really day out, that one. That was like going down to the 18-footers on the harbour.

SR: But what were they made out of? They were matchboxes, weren't they?

RH: Just little bits of wood like carved in their backyards, shape, you know, just with a penknife.

SR: Alexandria Canal would have been a pretty dirty kind of place, wouldn't it?

RH: Actually, no, it wasn't.

SR: No?

RH: No, it wasn't. Further down towards Ricketty Street where the other canals from Tempe and that used to run in, it used to get pretty murky around there but that area there it was unusually clean.

SR: And did you ever swim in it?

RH: Oh, no, no, couldn't swim. You wouldn't be game enough to swim in that, no, no.

SR: And did you race boats there?

RH: Yes.

SR: Did you bet?

RH: No, I never had money to bet.

SR: What about the two-up schools? Do you know anything about the one at the brick pit?

RH: Yes. There used to be a big two-up school there.

SR: What's a "big" two-up school?

RH: Because they used to kick us kids out. Well, you could get between sixty to eighty people around, betting on them.

46.06 **SR: Did your dad bet?**

RH: No, no.

SR: Not with the SPs ['starting price' bookmakers on horse races] either?

RH: No, no. On occasions he might've had his bet. In his later years, actually, he worked at the AJC [Australian Jockey Club] for about fifteen years because all the old fellas used to get a job just opening gates and picking up rubbish and things like that; they used to go 'round with a little prodder and pick up paper. He used to be in the

members' stand on the gate there. But I suppose he had his bet on occasions but he wasn't a big punter.

SR: Because a lot of people actually got by in the Depression by betting a bit if they bet carefully.

RH: Oh, I know the punting and two-up was pretty rife around our area.

SR: Did you ever hear about the police raiding them or anything?

RH: Oh, God yes. You'd often get the police raiding them, yes. They'd come down in old 1927 Chevrolet cars and they'd all jump out.

SR: Were they like Black Marias?

RH: No, the Black Marias were the big ones where they shot them into. They'd follow that one down and when they caught them and pinched them, then in the Black Maria they'd go.

SR: It sounds very Keystone Copish.

RH: It was. And any of us kids was "Get out of here", you know.

SR: What were the police like? I've heard a few horror tales and there were quite a few famous police.

48.00 RH: Yes, yes. Raymond Blissard [?], he was one of our most famous up 'round Redfern.

SR: Describe him to me.

RH: He finished up a detective inspector. You must have heard him hear about two years ago. He was in the papers, Raymond Blissard. They used to call in 'The Blizzard' because - - -

SR: I might have heard of Blizzard.

RH: - - - of his cold bloody nature – excuse the expression. He'd bail you up. You'd be walking up Botany Road up towards Redfern and him and a couple of other policemen there, they'd get you against the wall, want to know what you've been doing and where you've been going.

SR: What time?

RH: Maybe six o'clock at night, seven o'clock.

SR: Really?

RH: You might be just out for a walk and they used to follow you nearly all the way home, make sure you got there.

SR: And how old were you when they said that to you?

RH: I suppose I'd be getting ‘round about twelve, thirteen.

SR: So they'd do that because they thought you were too young to be out?

RH: Yes. But I mean there wasn’t the danger or the maliciousness of things that went on because there wasn’t much else to do at home. I mean we had no radio and things like that and you'd go for a walk because you never had money to do anything else and by virtue of the fact – you'd know you was doing the right thing but, of course, they was just in case you'd do something.

SR: And did you ever hear of Long Tack Sam?

RH: Long Tack Sam, my word, yes, yes.

SR: What can you remember about him?

RH: Well, he was a very good runner so it was no good giving cheek to Long Tack Sam because he’d outpace you, he’d run you down and grab you.

50.09 **SR: And give you a kick?**

RH: Yes. He always managed to get the boot in the you know where.

SR: And what about somebody called ‘The Gorilla’? You'd didn’t know him?

RH: No, never heard of that fella.

SR: He was another cop.

RH: But they really had things under control, them fellas, talking about Long Tack Sam and the Blizzard, they had things really under control. If you stepped out of line with them you'd know you'd be in trouble because not like today people were scared of the damn police force.

SR: Did they have reason to be?

RH: No reason because you wouldn’t be doing anything but people were just scared of the law – I know I was.

SR: Did they have a reputation for bashing people up?

RH: Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge.

SR: People were just scared anyway?

RH: They'd just hunt us kids home, you know.

SR: Were there people that you had to avoid?

RH: No.

SR: So there wasn't anybody in the local area who you were told to keep right away from because they were not too nice?

RH: No. If there was known criminals like petty thieves and things like that they used to stick to themselves.

SR: Was Nicker Fox around when you were around?

RH: Nigger and Natty [?], yes, and Sammy Fox, yes.

SR: You're saying the name "Nicker" or "Nigger"?

RH: Nigger.

SR: Nigger?

RH: Nigger is what they called him, yes.

SR: Why?

RH: I heard a lot of variations. Because he was a bit dark-coloured.

SR: Was he Aboriginal?

RH: No. They said his mother was frightened by an Abo or something. You know, it's all things used to go around in them days.

52.01 **SR: Did you know him or you've only heard about him?**

RH: No, I knew him, I knew him.

SR: Well, tell us about him.

RH: Knew Nigger. Of course they was a lot older than me then but I knew them, I knew them to talk to.

SR: Was he an adult then?

RH: Yes, he was an adult then, yes.

SR: He lived down on Mitchell Road or something, didn't he, or something?

RH: That's right, yes. Just down from Nigger and Natty Fox's place and Sam used to live just up the road so they were all on that one line.

SR: Who's Sam?

RH: Their brother, Sam Fox.

SR: Right. Who's Natty?

RH: But Nigger and Natty, they were the best known in Alexandria because they were fighters.

SR: Was Natty a boy?

RH: Yes.

SR: Not his wife or anything?

RH: No, no, Nat Fox, yes, Natty Fox, yes. He was a big bloke, ooh, he was a giant of a fella he was, a real big fella.

SR: And they were into sly grog, weren't they?

RH: Into anything that they could get their hands on to make a quid.

SR: I've heard they weren't real nice. I mean I've heard people talk about other crims who were sort of basically all right but I haven't heard anything good about Nigger Fox.

RH: Well, no, because if you step out of line with Nigger you know you're going to get a bashing.

SR: Really?

RH: Yes, and the same with Natty.

SR: Did they lend money?

RH: Yes, and if you didn't pay it back you were sure got a bashing. They sort of ruled that little bit of area, Mitchell Road there where the Parkview Hotel was right opposite Alexandria Fire Station – I think it's still there too, the fire station.

SR: Did he run prostitution?

RH: That I don't know, that I don't know because we was very innocent in them days towards girls and prostitution and things like that; you wouldn't know what the heck was going on.

SR: Just in terms of crime in the area, was there much crime? Like were there break and enters and that kind of thing happening or was it a safe neighbourhood?

54.07 RH: No, we had a safe neighbourhood. We was only talking about this only a couple of years ago. We never had our front door key out of our door and we lost our back door key when we first got there and never, ever replaced it so you could just go out in them days.

SR: So you weren't worried about the likes of Fox or whoever breaking into your house? They were into different sort crime?

RH: No, no. I don't think they done them sort of things. They're on a different angle because breaking into anyone's home, you know, there's nothing there to take, everyone was that damn poor.

SR: So did he do SP booking?

RH: Yes, yes. That's where they made their money, with SP booking and two-up because there was a couple of good two-up schools in Alexandria and Redfern area that was run by Puggie Hourigan[?].

SR: Where were they, where did they have them – a set place?

RH: In Mitchell Road and Botany Road.

SR: Who's this guy, what's his name – Hourigan?

RH: Hourigan, actually it's Hourigan.

SR: Hourigan and what was his first name?

RH: Puggie.

SR: Puggie Hourigan.

RH: Puggie Hourigan, yes.

SR: I've never heard of him.

RH: Haven't you?

SR: No.

RH: Well, he was a local identity. The oldies, someone'll tell you about that.

SR: Did you know him?

RH: Yes, I was good friends with the family.

SR: Were you friends with the Foxes as well?

RH: Yes.

SR: Were they as bad as they've been made out to be or not?

RH: Not as far as I know. Anyone that borrowed money that didn't pay their debts that was a crime, you know, that was a real horrible crime and anyone that upset anyone they're sure to get a fight or get a punch in the nose or something.

56.16 But basically anyone could walk the streets, not like now. God, I haven't been up to our shopping centre at night-time because you're not game but in them days I used to leave home and go for a walk on me own, myself, and go up through Redfern and Waterloo, over to Surry Hills and walk all around there and that.

SR: And you weren't worried about those razor gangs that were apparently in Surry Hills? Were there razor gangs in Alexandria?

RH: No.

SR: No. And Nigger Fox, he got shot, didn't he?

RH: Yes.

SR: Do you know what that was about?

RH: I don't really, no, but I know he got shot, yes. They were standover men, there's no two ways about that.

SR: But if you weren't involved with them then you weren't picked on?

RH: They were quite nice fellas, you know.

SR: They seemed to get on with the razor gangs. What everybody says is that when they had their brawls they were usually only fighting each other and everybody else in the neighbourhood was just left out of it.

RH: Yes. Well, this is what my mother says, you know, 'round The Rocks. They were confronted – not confronted themselves but that episode every second night someone coming into their area and want to take over. Well, the razor gang, they'd start onto them then; it was a conflict.

SR: And how did people feel about the people like Fox and Hourigan?

58.00 RH: They seemed to live with them.

SR: They were accepted?

RH: Yes, yes, and things went on. I mean you mind your business and I'll mind mine, that was the law of the land down there, keep yourself out of trouble.

SR: O.K. So can you remember any adventures you had as a kid when you were with your mates?

RH: The best adventure was like going out. We used to go swimming in the North Sydney pool when it first opened. We used to manage to get a couple of pence together and we used to do a lot of swimming over there.

SR: Did you catch a train?

RH: No, the tram used to run Circular Quay and the ferry, the ferry across which I think was a penny down the tram and a penny in the ferry and a penny into the – so for sixpence you'd have a good day out, you know. But my favourite turnout was when, as I said, about the horse dock, when the horses used to come in from the races. And then all the cattle used to come down from the country for the Royal Easter Show but they'd drive them down Mitchell Road and over the top of Raglan Street down through Moore Park way and into the Showground.

SR: Gee. That must have been quite spectacular.

RH: It was. Every year they used to. Of course, now they truck them down. Trucks and that weren't mobile; they couldn't get over the mountains a lot of trucks on their own, let alone with cattle on them. And when the circuses come in, Wirth's Circus and other circuses, they used to bring them in by train there and you used to get the elephants going up there and they used to put up the shutters and let you see the tigers in there and things and that used to be a real day out, that.

60.23 **SR: Did you go to the circus then?**

RH: Yes. My father managed to often get passes for us because he knew – there's a chap in Belmont Street, he had a butcher shop. Gawd, for the life of me I can't get his surname – George. Anyhow, he'd give dad about five double passes because he was their New South Wales manager when they come here, Wirth's Circus, so we often got to the circus when it was in town, yes.

SR: Tape 2. Interview with Bob Hammond, 21st of February 1995. What other events, big events of the year. You've mentioned the circus and the animals going to the Show. Were there any other sort of annual things? What about Cracker Night?

RH: Yes, that was an important night in our lives. We couldn't handle them, of course; dad used to do all that business and he put them in bottles and cans, the rockets, especially them because they were pretty good in them days. I don't know why they've banned them now because they're only irresponsible people that muck it up for everyone.

62.01 **SR: Was there a sense of community? I mean did they have a community kind of bonfire? Would people get together in the street and have a joint bonfire?**

RH: No. No, actually there was no place access to really light a fire there and you'd have to have it in the middle of the road or on the footpath and that, well, it's too dangerous, close to people's houses so it was more or less just a family night.

SR: Well, what sort of games did you play as a kid?

RH: As I said before we played a lot of cricket and marbles and on the hotel - the Camellia Grove Hotel wall had a big sectioned wall there – there was handball, they used to play a lot of handball there.

SR: What was the name of the hotel?

RH: Camelia Grove.

SR: Yes.

RH: That's on the corner of Alexander Street and Henderson Road. And, of course, our house was just right angles just from the hotel in Alexander Street and they had this big brick wall there. It was a flat wall - luckily the windows and that was further away – and there was a lot of handball played there. It used to be an event of an afternoon and especially of a weekend, Saturday and Sunday it used to be a big event.

SR: Did you ever have billycart races?

RH: Yes. We used to make our billycart with bits and pieces of wood and pick up some wheels wherever we could. All the things that sometimes you see on the movies when they go back quite a few years, done all them things.

SR: Can you remember any jokes or rhymes from your childhood?

64.04 RH: No. No, there wasn't many.

SR: What about songs – can you remember the songs that were popular at that time?

RH: Yes. Well, mainly I suppose you'd have to put Bing Crosby in that era when they started listening to him and then along came the Andrews Sisters and then a lot of the war songs you used to hear on the – we eventually got a radio and you'd always hear the Vera Lynn and Gracie Fields because there used to be a lot of war talk in them days, those early days of the war, and not much interest to us. Me father I remember he used to like the seven o'clock news or something and in them days it'd be all bad, you know, there wouldn't be any good news with a world war going on.

SR: In a typical evening, say after you had the main meal in the evening what would you do after dinner, how would you spend the time like if there's no TV?

RH: We used to go just out the front and play in the street there with the local kids. Or some of me sisters they might stay inside and they'd have games, Ludo or something like that they'd play but mainly I used to be outside, playing out there and we used to make our own fun.

66.01 **SR: So you went to the local state school. What was that, Alexandria Public?**

RH: Yes, yes.

SR: Did most of the local kids go there?

RH: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact I've got – switch off a minute.

SR: Which one's you? [Looking at photograph]

RH: The good little bloke with a blazer on there.

SR: You've got the blazer on?

RH: Yes.

SR: Gosh.

RH: Must have been a hand-me-down somewhere along the line.

SR: Yes. Well, you look more respectable than anybody except the kid with the glasses down there.

RH: Who's that?

SR: I don't know. Have a look. There's one very proper-looking kid, him.

RH: Yes. Fred Stemmings [?]. He come from Lawrence Street down in Alexandria. That was further – you know where Lawrence Street is at all?

SR: No.

RH: You go down Mitchell Road where that Parkview Hotel was where the Foxes live and then you come up Park Street there and it was the last street that you got to on that block from Mitchell Road.

SR: And what year was this photo taken in? Can you show us that, turn that to the camera[video camera flaming interview]?

RH: 1936.

SR: 1936. They look like a bunch of characters.

RH: A bunch of outlaws.

SR: Yes. We might get a copy of that.

JR: And which one's you?

RH: The one with the blazer.

68.11 **SR: So what year did you say that was?**

RH: 1936.

SR: 1936.

RH: Nine.

SR: So you were nine or ten, yes.

RH: Now, there's a majority of kids in here like Freddie Waugh[?], Fatty Dickerson[?] and Tommy Stott[?] - as a matter of fact I only seen him just before Christmas in Alexandria – hadn't seen him for donkey's years.

SR: Really?

RH: The majority of these or quite a few of these fellas, we went to that, you know Patonga, Little Patonga, where that Department of Recreation - - -

SR: There's sort of a holiday camp there.

RH: Yes. Well, I was one of the first to jump off the ferry there when they started to open that. No wharf or anything there; you used to have to just take your shoes off and jump off the ferry – used to get in real close and off you go and up on the beach.

SR: Did they take kids from the school on that camp or whatever?

RH: Yes, yes.

SR: Did your family actually ever go on holidays?

RH: No, no.

SR: So at the school did you get a chance very often to go, say, to Patonga?

RH: Not really, not really. That was about the first and last sort of thing, the one and only.

SR: Now, with most of your friends what did their dads do, where did they work?

69.55 RH: Well, there was a collection of them. There was two that worked on the railway at Eveleigh Workshops and another one, he was a foreman at the glassworks in Euston Road – I don't think they're still there now, they're closed – and there was one fella, Mr Cahill [?], I think he was an engineer but I didn't know where he worked at but.

SR: Well, where did the majority of the people work in the neighbourhood?

RH: Basically locally, you know, it'd be local jobs.

SR: In factories and what have you?

RH: Yes, because there was X amount of factories around Alexandria. You'd think in them days they were a fair way away but they were still in Alexandria. Like down near the Alexandria Canal area like there's a hell of a lot of factories, in Bourke Street for instance, Bourke Road, and around that area so there was X amount. My sisters, they used to work with Supertex - you know the chenille – that was just up the road from our place in Henderson Road.

SR: And did many of the women work or did most of the mothers of your friends - - -

RH: No, mothers nearly were always at home, yes, because in them days the men worked and the women was at home. It's vice versa these days, I think, isn't it, with the majority of them?

SR: Yes. Were there places that you were not allowed to go, like where you were forbidden to go because they were unsafe or for whatever reason?

72.01 RH: For the railway, yes, for a start, Alexandria Rail, but they had a ramp, a bridge – it wasn't a ramp, it was a bridge – that used to go up and go right across the railway lines down onto the workshop side, you know, that'd be on the Darlington side and we used to delight in going up there not with the knowledge of our parents, going up there and waiting for a steam train to come along and the drivers used to see us there so they'd put extra puff on and used to blow the smoke and steam all over us but we thought it was great fun. Used to like the smell of trains too when I was a kid.

SR: Would that be one of the smells you'd associate with Alexandria?

RH: Of the trains? Yes, yes. Because there was clanging going on all night long because them goods yards they never stopped because they handled just about everything. Most everything that come down from the country was most always by train and they'd be shunting all night long but it never, ever kept us awake or anything. I can't remember ever saying "Oh, God, that noise"; I think it was just part of the area.

SR: What was the ethnic mix?

RH: I don't think we had any ethnic to my knowledge that I used to play with or was friends of ours.

SR: Can you remember any, I don't know, other communities like Asian or Indian communities?

RH: No.

SR: Were there any Aboriginal families in the area?

RH: No, not until the later years. When I say "later years" I might have been about, say, about sixteen or something like that they started to drift into the area.

74.17 **SR: They would have been post World War II immigrants?**

RH: Yes, yes. But actually Tony Mundine, the fighter, his auntie used to live in Phillip Street that we used to visit up there on a couple of occasions and they were quite nice people, quite nice people.

SR: Well, when you went to school you went to the local state school. What was it like, what was your school life like, how did the teachers treat you?

RH: We had two teachers there. So one, Mr McManus[?], he was the fifth class teacher. He was a real bullyboy. I think he used to just like caning you, watch us suffer. And we had our fourth class teacher, Mr Hawke [?], he had a crippled leg and he was a really, really good cricketer and bowler and we used to have a lot of fun with him. He used to take us down the local park in Alexandria or Erskineville because we had access to both, Erskineville just that side and Alexandria just down the road. And he used to get us all playing cricket on teams and we used to challenge Erskineville and Newtown and things like that. But basically that'd be about the – but we used to do a lot of gymnastics. They used to keep you pretty fit with gymnastics and things like that – but cricket mainly. But our schoolteacher, our headmaster, Mr Buxton [?], he wasn't a very pleasant fella.

76.12 **SR: No?**

RH: No. Wasn't a very pleasant fella at all.

SR: Why?

RH: I don't know. I think that's just his nature.

SR: What would he do?

RH: Not say "Hello, how are you doing?", just scowl at you, "I'd like to hit you or chew your head off" or something like that. And then McManus, he done all the caning and he might give you the cane whether you need it or not just in case.

SR: And who was the nice one?

RH: Mr Hawke.

SR: Mr Hawke?

RH: Yes, yes.

SR: Was there much rivalry between say Erskineville and Alexandria and the Newtown kids or the Redfern kids, was there any?

RH: Oh, yes, yes. In sport?

SR: In anything.

RH: Yes. Well, I don't think there was any rivalry as far as the area was concerned. I mean I could always walk around Redfern, Newtown, Waterloo.

SR: But in sport you would compete?

RH: Oh compete, yes, yes.

SR: And were some areas looked down upon than others? Like did the Alexandria kids look down on the Waterloo kids or were there any areas that were thought better or worse?

RH: No, only the people used to do this themselves. Some people thought they were a bit better than someone else but that didn't wash with a lot of people; I know it didn't wash with me; I just treated everyone as they come.

SR: And were you ever told that you weren't allowed to mix with kids say from Newtown or Redfern or Waterloo – there was never any element of that?

RH: No, not in our family, no.

SR: Did any of the kids ever get into sort of gang type – I mean not gangs like violent gangs like we hear about today but sort of friendly gangs where you'd have wars, like the Alexandria kids fight the Newtown kids, throwing rocks - - -

78.10 RH: No.

SR: - - - threw metal from the railway tracks?

RH: No, no. We'd have at least seven or eight friends that we all grew up together and went to school together and we're just friends but we went out not as a gang as such, you know, but there was a gang of us but not as a gang as such because we never treated anyone like that and I'm pleased to say – oh, maybe on a ferry or a bus or something you'd run through quick and make a yahoo or something like that but never, ever attempted to upset the people or anything like that or interfere with them. Actually, I didn't like anyone interfering with me

and I used to like that back: I didn't interfere with them. I'd talk to them and, as I said, I used to go with these fellas and we never got into any trouble like this, none of this gang wars. These are hooligans today, that's all they are. I can't stand them, actually.

SR: Maybe not necessarily at school or home but did you get any sex education as a child?

RH: We wouldn't have known what it was anyhow if they tried to give us sex education. No, no.

SR: O.K. So it sort of didn't happen?

RH: No.

SR: Did you have any toys?

RH: Yes. Yes, we always used to manage to scrape up a toy or two, mainly wooden toys, things like that, and barrows. And, of course, it was one of dad's tricks, I remember was he'd get a Lifesaver [sweets]– they used to have the tin trucks with the round Lifesavers for the Show so he'd get that at Christmas - most probably got it cheaper then – that'd be a Christmas present.

80.26 **SR: What about books – did you read?**

RH: No, only what we had a different schools but there was none of the books around like you could look up anything. This is why I insisted with Wayne when he first started to get an encyclopaedia and a dictionary.

SR: Did you ever go to the cinema?

RH: Oh, yes. Used to go the Lawson at Redfern a lot.

SR: And what were some of the films that you saw there?

RH: Mainly westerns, you know, of Tom Mix and his horse Cement[?] and Buck Rogers and he was that bloody moonman guy, you know, the first man in space, Buck Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy. And then you'd get to these – how would you put it – soft soap ones like *Naughty Marietta* and *Camille* and all. Oh, terrible, and they used to show them.

SR: Did you go often to the movies?

RH: Yes, used to go quite a bit.

SR: Most kids could afford that then? The '30s we're talking about, isn't it?

RH: Well, yes, you could because I mean it was only a penny or something up in the back stalls.

82.03 **SR: Is that Saturday afternoon matinees?**

RH: That's right, yes. The one in Botany Road they used to call The Bughouse. That used to be the old Plaza.

SR: Yes.

RH: Yes, we used to go there quite a bit because when they used to say you'd go up in the mezzanine you only went up three steps – they were the back stalls.

SR: Why was it called The Bughouse?

RH: I think it just got its name because everyone used to start scratching or something because I think it originally was a disused warehouse and things like that because in them days they used to make up a lot of things, part and parcel of growing up in that area, making up a lot of things.

SR: Was there sort of a social focus of the area, was there a place where people would meet, say where the men would meet like at a particular pub or whether women would get together? Was there sort of, I don't know, just a popular place?

RH: They used to have their dances up at Alexandria Town Hall or near the old Bughouse, the old picture show there was a hall, never had a name, I don't know from that day to this but they used to go there for dances and like balls they used to call them in them days.

SR: What street was that where the Bughouse was?

RH: In Botany Road.

SR: Botany Road, right.

RH: Yes.

SR: So what about the women? Was there like a corner shop where they could talk or did they go to each other's houses?

RH: Oh, they used to talk mainly over the back fence or over the front fence or "I'm just going down to see Mrs Sligg [?] for a moment" or

"I'm going over to see Mrs Walton for a moment" and they'd have their cups of tea and be there for two hours or so.

84.11 Don't know what they got to talk about but it was taboo for the kids because soon as anyone come, any visitors or anyone come, "Out, you kids. Go on, out and play".

SR: Get chased out?

RH: Get chased out, yes.

SR: Gee.

RH: It wasn't part and parcel of the conversation.

SR: And what about the local pubs? What were the popular places for them? Did your father drink?

RH: Yes.

SR: I've heard a lot about the six o'clock closing, that it used to be quite amazing that everyone got turfed out of the pub at six o'clock.

RH: Yes, well, that's right, yes.

SR: Do you remember any - - -

RH: Yes, six o'clock, yes, yes. And, well, there was always sly grog after from what I can ascertain because my father – we're not on camera – so my father used to go around doing the quarts of sly grog.

SR: He used to what?

RH: He used to fill quarts of beer; they used to have the old quarts in them days.

SR: Yes.

RH: And you could have a favourite knock on the publican's door and go there and get yourself a quart after closing time because they was up to all these capers, you know. I don't think they went without a drink, the ones that could afford it, of course.

SR: And did your dad fill them up, the bottles?

RH: Yes, he used to fill the quarts up, yes, for the Balaclava Hotel - that was on the corner of Buckland Street and Mitchell Road.

SR: I've actually asked all of these questions. Where did most people shop?

85.59 RH: Botany Road. Botany Road was their mecca of shopping because they had their Wynn's and S.R. Buttles, they're grocers, and Fred Shugg[?], the butcher and the grocer and Shoalies[?] was the butcher up there. Kirby's Chemist which his name's still over there in Botany Road, the chemist, and Corr's [?] on the other side and there's Vic La Sur [?], the fruit man and they had plenty of shopping there in them days.

SR: What were the most popular newspapers at that time? What did you get at your family?

RH: I wasn't into papers much in them days. The *Labor Daily* I'd remember, the *Labor Daily* and the *Sun*.

SR: Did you get any magazines? The *Sun*.

RH: The *Sun*, yes, because I can always remember they had like the rays of the sun and a man and a couple of horses, I think they were, on the sides, yes.

SR: What about magazines – were there any magazines at home?

RH: No, only comic books.

SR: Who'd you like?

RH: You used to pick up a comic book.

SR: Who were the characters in the comics, what ones did you like best?

RH: There was a variety of them. There used to be *Fatty Arbuckle* and *Superman*, things like that. I just forget them now but there was quite a good variety. Actually, them comics now, I believe, are worth a small fortune, they're a collector's item.

SR: Should have kept them.

RH: Oh, yes.

SR: Can you remember any common illnesses – what were the common illnesses that people got?

RH: There seemed to be a lot of boils, you know, boils and abscesses around in them days and runny noses, common cold and I

think it was the neglect of society because they used to concoct a lot of rubs just with vinegar and brown paper and all this business, you know, not like you'd go to the chemist and get a good rub or a tablet or something like that or even a Bex [analgesic].

88.23 There was a lot of common illnesses and sore feet and things like that because you had no shoes. You used to kick your toes or you might have a pair of shoes but they was your good shoes. You had a good shirt, a good pair of pants and a good pair of shoes and all the rest they could have had the bum out of them or all sorts of things.

SR: It didn't matter?

RH: Didn't matter, no.

SR: And can you remember any of the deaths?

RH: Any -?

SR: People dying, locals.

RH: Well, we had a tragedy in our family with one of my brothers - I was only young myself. It was in 1937 when my little brother, Johnnie, died.

SR: What happened to him?

RH: He had a lung infection and he was only about twelve months, thirteen months old, I think, and of course anything you got down there in them days, even though it was phlegm it was a tragedy.

SR: Could they take him to hospital?

RH: Yes, but they couldn't do much for him. The medical bit in them days was very sparse.

SR: Well, what about people getting hurt at work? Like then they didn't have the industrial health and safety provisions at work.

RH: No.

SR: Did you ever hear of your friends' parents or people being hurt?

RH: I can't recall of anything major but I remember them coming home with busted fingers and a bandage around their hand where they jammed their fingers, caught them in a machine or something.

90.16 **SR: Can you remember people getting TB and diseases like that?**

RH: There was a couple of cases. Actually, in one family there was about four boys died of meningitis at different ages and that was a bit of a tragedy for the area because people in them days were pretty close-knit and anyone got hurt or anyone died usually everyone felt for them. It's not like today, someone's died they'd say "Oh, gee, I didn't know he died. How long has he been dead?" but you'd know on the spot.

SR: Yes.

RH: Bad news always travels fast, doesn't it?

SR: Yes. Were people supportive of each other in the area?

RH: They were, I think, yes, as much as they could.

SR: What did you know of the outside world outside your local area?

RH: Not a great deal, only what you got from the atlas, world atlas that you used to have, and what you had at school. They used to tell you about these different countries, China and things like this, but you wouldn't know much about them, only there's Chinese live there and South Americans lived in South America but apart from that never come in contact. I can't remember in me young days of many ethnic families, can't remember any at all.

92.16 **SR: Can you remember cars sort of becoming more prevalent? Did that happen across the '30s at all, was there a change then or was it more after the war?**

RH: No, before the war there was one chap lived around next street from us, Snowy Holmes [?] he had a little SP bookmaking business going at the local hotel and, of course, he used to drive around in a motorcar. He always had a motorcar so must have been pretty prosperous, the SP business in them days.

SR: Most people wouldn't have had cars.

RH: No, no. And he was very generous because if he had a winning day he'd be driving past and he'd see us kids and he'd throw a handful of pennies out. People around the area, all of these places, you know, Alexandria, Waterloo, Redfern, they'd always help. Say if they had tuppence, you'd have a penny of it; that's the type of people they were.

You'd never be in any trouble, put it that way, they'd always find a way. That's what I got rigged into it when I was growing up as a kid.

SR: Can you remember it being more polluted or less polluted than now?

RH: You'd always see the smokestacks going, belting out. I mean you'd see it coming from Eveleigh Workshops. It was there all the time, like it was virtually twenty four hours a day that was there.

94.17 Then there'd be factories opposite that'd be spewing it out and then down at Metters and Hadfields further down Mitchell Road, all them places. Everything was coal-fired or wood-fired in them days so it was always a big chimney sticking out of somewhere. There was always smoke coming out of it, no matter what time of the day there was always something coming out of it but I can't remember the effects that it had.

SR: You can't remember it sort of being smoggy?

RH: No, no.

SR: Can you remember the opening of the Harbour Bridge?

RH: No, not really, no.

SR: Did you ever go to Luna Park?

RH: Yes. Used to love going to Luna Park, especially when the Yanks were over there because you'd always get chewing gum or something like that off them or a chocolate bar or something which you never got down there. It was good; the Americans were very generous, very generous. But I used to like going to Luna Park – it was something different. And I used to like to ride on the ferry, whether I was going to Luna Park or Manly, any of them places.

SR: Did you go to Manly very often?

RH: Often as we could, you know.

SR: As children that would be a day out, would it?

RH: No. We'd go to Bronte mainly, that's where we went, sometimes Coogee or Tamarama but mainly Bronte because it was good access for mum and the family, grabbing all us kids off the tram and just straight down there and then coming back. I think the access was the main thing, you know, it was easier to get to.

96.12 **SR: What's your happiest memory?**

RH: Happiest? That's a tricky one. I've got a lot of happy memories but I think that at Patonga, going on that trip to Patonga and being the first to open it up to what it is today, the big place it is today so that was one of my happy times and when I joined the Scouts, that was another one, the Cubs. That was a really enjoyable one.

SR: What did you do with the Cubs? Tell me about your time at the Cubs.

RH: Well, in them days practically everyone had to be a member of the Cubs or Scouts, the boys, because they used to teach you the discipline and things like that.

SR: Did they?

RH: Yes. We had a lot of fun doing it too.

SR: Would you go on camping trips?

RH: Yes, go on camping trips, yes.

SR: And where did they take you?

RH: Waterfall was a popular spot in them days but sometimes you couldn't go because parents didn't have the money to pay for these things because you'd have to take a certain amount of food and your fares and things like this and you'd always have to have some sort of clothes so it just wasn't possible to do this.

SR: But a lot of the local kids did join?

RH: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: What's your saddest memory?

98.10 RH: Well, I suppose when I was a kid seeing my brother because they never took them to the funeral parlours and that, it was on the table in the bedroom or something. That really saddened me, that particular time when he died because it was just like there's all of us and why him? We thought we're most probably invincible, you know, it just didn't happen. That was a sad day and another sad day was only three years ago when my father died. The saddest thing about that was on the Sunday he died, well, all my sisters and that they used to go on a Sunday and I said "I'll leave it till the Monday. He'll have a visitor then" – this was in the nursing home then out at Randwick – and he died on the Sunday afternoon so that was another sad incident. But my life has been pretty happy. There's been little ups and downs but

weathered the storm but they're the really sad ones that stick in your mind.

SR: Is there anything you want to say that I haven't asked, anything we haven't covered?

RH: No, I think we've gone through it pretty well, haven't we?

SR: Yes.

RH: Only that I had a pretty good life at Alexandria. As hard as it might have been I never regretted one day and I wouldn't have been brought up anywhere else because Alexandria people are really great.

100.04 **SR: O.K, thank you.**

Interview ends