

**NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING**

**“Millers Point Oral History Project”**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

INTERVIEWEE: **Brian Harrison**

TAPE NUMBERS: MP-FH3 & 4 (2 Tapes)

INTERVIEWER: Frank HEIMANS

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DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 115 mins 58 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.*

00:00 START OF TAPE MP-FH3 SIDE A

00:03 Tape identification

*Brian, I usually start an interview by asking a little bit of detail about every person, so could you tell me when you were born.*

00:32 I was born on 18th August 1946.

*Was it in Sydney?*

Yes it was, St Margaret's Hospital.

*Was your family living at Millers Point at the time, or Dawes Point?*

00:54 No, they weren't, they were living in Kings Cross, that is where my parents met, in Kings Cross.

*Tell me just a bit about your parents, give me some background about them.*

01:05 My father was a cook in Woolworths at Kings Cross and my mother worked there as a waitress and that is how they met. I have only seen it once in my life, that my mother can make a milkshake and she could throw it from one container to the other without spilling a drop, I have only seen that happen once. I don't know how I got on to that but anyhow, that is where they met, and I was born at St Margaret's and then we moved from Kings Cross and I was six months old when I came to this house.

*This very house at 11 Lower Fort Street?*

Yes.

*Now your family has a background of owning leases on residentials, do they?*

01:58 Yes that is right. My great-great-grandmother ran a boarding house in Kings Cross, my father's mother also lived in Kings Cross as well. There were a lot of characters in those days, it wasn't that sleazy suburb that it has been for a while so it was a colourful place to live.

*It was quite a bohemian place too, wasn't it.*

02:17 It was because you had Rosaleen Norton, who used to live here in Darling House for a short while and she moved to Kings Cross. It was rumoured here when she lived at Darling House that three local men committed suicide over her, but when she went to Kings Cross she had a little terrace house and she had a sign out the front, 'Only girls, goblins, witches and ghosts were allowed in.' My aunt tells a wonderful story, it is a shame she is not here to tell it because my aunt was a colourful person and it was just after the war and women took on the roles of a lot of men and Shirley opened the door and there

was the telegram girl, all dressed up in her gear and it was Rosaleen Norton and Shirley nearly fell over because she didn't expect Rosaleen Norton to be there.

03:15 Just on Darling House: on the right-hand side of the gate was Australia's first outdoor theatre, it was a silent movie theatre and people used to pay and hang off the rock at the back there and watch the silent movies beside Darling House.

*That is interesting we didn't know that. So the Shirley you are talking about of course is Shirley Ball.*

03:32 Shirley Ball, my aunt for fifty-eight years until she died, she was a real character. We can talk a lot about Aunt Shirley and now that she is not here maybe I can talk a bit more freely about getting caned, whacked over the hands.

*Why don't you have a go.*

03:52 Well Shirley was my aunt, she was a wonderful person. She did a lot for the community, took on developers, took on anyone, but she did it with a style, and a passion, and a wit. She was very, very intelligent. She didn't have a cause for about six months, wasn't fighting with the Council, developers or anyone else, so she thought her brain was going stale, so over three nights she wrote down four thousand eight hundred actors' names and I said to her, 'You wrote down that many,' and she said, 'Yes,' and I said to her, 'How many spelling mistakes?' and she said, 'None, of course.' She had absolutely beautiful handwriting, she wrote a book called *Mum's Boarding House*, which is on her boarding house, my grandmother's boarding, my uncle's boarding house and my mother's boarding house here and it was published and it is all about my family and it also takes in the one in Kings Cross. So we have been in boarding houses for a hundred and six years or something, which is a long time, hell of a long time.

05:11 No one expected Shirley to be married or have children, she didn't across that way. She was a big person, she smoked Craven-A cork tip, she would blow the smoke in your face, if you didn't like you didn't have to talk to her. She would go to a function, walk in, get a chair, light up and people would pay homage to her: Lord Mayors, politicians, Craig Knowles. Scully used to call her the living legend, Frank Sartor used to ring her up.

*Brian, what sort of advice would Shirley Ball give you when you were a young boy?*

05:59 I don't think she gave me a great deal of advice because she didn't want to upset her sister, my mother, but did give me the space. We lived in fairly cramped little rooms here because it was a boarding house but it gave me an escape to visit my aunt, to visit my grandmother and visit my other aunt and uncle. Just to see the way she did things and the

way she talked to people. I am a lot like her, more so like her than my parents because my father was the most negative person I ever met in my life and I am probably one of the most positive, like Shirley. My mother was very intelligent but she didn't get on with her sister and her sister didn't get on with her, but that is another story.

06:49 With Shirley, just being there and seeing how she handled people and also the flair of the woman. She was an artist, she was a fantastic writer, there wasn't much that Aunt Shirley couldn't do. People, as I was saying before, could never imagine that she had a husband and children, she didn't come across like that. Her two children haven't turned out as well as what Shirley would have liked, but that goes back to our childhood. I think the reason why Neil hasn't turned out is because of Shirley and Catherine is because of her father.

07:35 The father, Harry, was born in Leicester and he had a motto when he was here, 'The next friend I make in Australia will be my first friend.' He worked on the waterfront, he never walked up to the corner shop in fifty-five years, Shirley doted on him all the time. He made his money having shares and he would play the share market, collected rare coins, and then he came into forging 1930 pennies. He would take a 1940 penny and he would take the '4' off the 1940, file it, then he would get a 1920 penny and he would file from the rear until he got to the '0' and sometimes when they dropped the '0' him and Shirley would be on the floor, licking their fingers and pointing it all over the floor trying to find the '0' because it was so small. Then he would attach the '0' to the coin and leave it out in the sun to tarnish it. Now when he tried to sell it they would go straight to the '0' so he was smarter than that, he would get a 1940 and leave the '0' and take the '4' off and put a three there. Uncle Harry was different, he liked to collect things that didn't belong to him, especially on the wharves and he was different, he was very dry.

09:05 He used to mainly look after the museum up there because Shirley ran it as a boarding house for twenty-seven years and then she had a passion to turn it into a museum. Shirley always got what she wanted, except for once, and I must tell you only one person that ever got over the top of Aunt Shirley. She turned it into a museum and Harry would hear the doorbell ring and he would go down and take the dollar from the person and say, 'Look at the ground floor, lower ground floor.' If he liked the look of you he would go back upstairs and wait for the front door to close, if he didn't he would sit on the stairs and he would whistle and he loved to whistle. This day a couple came in and he told them to go downstairs, he didn't like the look of the gentleman so he sat on the seat. The

doorbell rang again, a big dark man came in with two beautiful dark ladies, Harry took the money from them and he started to whistle *Scarlet Ribbon*, the big man looked down and said, 'That's my tune,' and Harry looked up and there was Harry Belafonte. Also Shirley had a run-in with Tammy Fraser, Malcolm Fraser's wife, in the museum and put her in her place and Malcolm was quite tickled because he couldn't do it.

10:17 Also Darling House, going back to Darling House, that building had no windows, there were dirt floors, it was falling down and she had a passion to turn it into an aged-care centre, she got federal, state and council funding and turned it into an aged-care centre which has been fantastic and it helps a lot of local people around here, especially to go there on a respite.

10:43 Aunt Shirley, when she died, I would maybe go up three or four times a day, I would go up there early in the morning, breakfast, and at night I used to finish the Ghost Tours in a building, which was quite amazing. The stories that she told me of that house - I could have run a Ghost Tour of that one house. Someone had drunk too much, a local man, a big local man, knocked on the wrong door, which happened to be Aunt Shirley's, barged in and started to strangle her inside her front hallway. Shirley was a very strong lady but he was overpowering her. Harry came down, he was only small but wiry and saved Aunt Shirley. Another one was a chap who hanged himself in the bathroom and as the boarders came home they would walk pass and knock on Shirley's door and ask, 'Is there someone in the toilet?' That went on for a while, so Harry finished up busting the door down and there was a chap hanging from the cistern in the toilet.

11:55 The police came and in those days they were fairly knock-about police sergeants, they went in there and he had a packet of cigarettes in his pocket, so they took those out and started to have a smoke and one of the police went up to his room and relieved him off his watch. Shirley found out about that and said to the sergeant, 'You'd better get down here, you'd better go and get that watch and put it back where it was, find out who took it.' Another man ran screaming from the house that he was going to get reinforcements and what happened was he found Scientology and went off his head, so Harry secured the front door and back door. The man went to the lane, broke the leg off a table, went to the corner house on the corner of Ferry Lane in Lower Fort Street, knocked on the door, an older couple came out and he killed the man instantly with the leg of the table and the woman died six weeks later.

12:53 I will tell you a nice story about the only person who ever got over Aunt Shirley.

Jimmy the Woodman lived around in Windmill Street, I think, I knew Jimmy and he was a bit slow, he would go from gate to gate selling barrow loads, billycarts of wood. In those days we used the wood for the copper, not for the fire - not many people had fires inside their houses. He would knock on the gate and Shirley would come out and say, 'How much is the wood Jimmy?' and he would say, 'F...f...f...five shillings,' so she'd pay the five shillings. The next week a knock on the gate, 'Morning Jimmy, how much is the wood?' 'S...s...s...six shillings.' So it kept going up and up. After a while Shirley was down at her mother's place - we called her 'Mum' - and my mother was there, the two sisters and the mother, sitting across having a cup of tea like they did every morning and never talked to each other. Shirley said to her mother and then her mother asked my mother, Shirley's sister, how much they were paying for the wood and they said, 'Five shillings a barrow load.' Shirley said, 'Now it is up to seven shillings Jimmy wants to charge me.'

14:05 So the next week knock on the back gate, Shirley opened it and she said, 'Good morning Jimmy how are you, how much is wood?' 'E...e...e...eight shillings.' She said, 'I'm your friend, remember when the garbage truck came down here and ran over your billycart, smashed it, and they all laughed and thought it was funny and I came out and roused on them and said, 'He's trying to earn a living, leave him alone,' she said, 'I'm your friend.' Shirley said, 'Why are you charging me now eight shillings and my mother and my sister only five shillings?' He said, 'B...b....b.....because you are silly enough to pay it.' So not many people ever got over Aunt Shirley, she was a character. She used to say, 'Come on Brian we are going to a function,' and we'd go and I'd say, 'I haven't got a name tag,' 'Don't worry about it, you are all right, just follow me,' and in she'd barge, she would never get a name tag. Yes, she was just a living legend, she fought the government under the landladies' battle. When the government developed Walsh Bay they were spending seven hundred and fifty million dollars the last developer, they were told to work in with Aunt Shirley.

15:25 I was on the committee, I was always like her heir, she groomed me to take over from her. Her wishes before she died she had a few and none of them have come through, but that is life. She ruled when she was down here but you can't rule from the grave, but a lot of people here still believe that she can rule from the grave. What Aunt Shirley did in the past you can't do now. She would walk into your place and light up, it wouldn't matter where you were. In Darling House no smoking aged-care but that didn't apply to the chairperson Aunt Shirley, she'd just walk in there, ashtray, and no one would say anything, no one.

*They still speak in awe of her.*

16:14 Yes. She would run the RAG meeting, which is the Rocks Action Group, and she took it over for fourteen years, never had an election because no one ever ran up against her. Stories would come and go, they'd try and get over Aunt Shirley but her wit and her intelligence was just too good. In fact people I'm sure they just went to the RAG meeting, it was better than watching TV because there was so much going on. You had politicians, you had police, you had everyone else there and she never took notes before, just took notes when she was there. The things that she would say to people, like they'd get a laugh but as a male if I said them they'd be out on the grass trying to rearrange my face.

17:00 When she died I took over the RAG for twelve months and settled it down because it could have gone into a lot of other hands. Then I stepped down and Millicent Chalmers, who was the Secretary under Shirley, took over. They made a fairly good force because Millicent is a very good writer, devoted to Shirley, which was difficult because Shirley, one day she'd talk to you and the next day she'd walk past you and then she'd say, 'Oh but so and so didn't talk to me, I'm not talking to them any more,' but she would do it first.

17:36 One thing I never ever found out while she was alive, and I found out after she died, was that she loved the poker machines. I was very close, she told me nearly everything, and I was amazed that she used to go into town and play the pokies. Well, the cigarettes finally got her in the end because when my mother and her sister Shirley were talking they'd be downstairs or in a room, mainly downstairs in the lounge room, and if my grandmother was there, there were three women smoking Craven-A cork tip. I used to come in and I would not know who was under that layer of smoke unless I got to the door and fanned the door backwards and forwards to find out who was under the smoke. That is why a year or so ago I was tested for minerals and cadmium and I'm off the scale and lead, cadmium because of smoking and I've never smoked and lead because I played on the Harbour Bridge and I'm full of lead. So I can thank the Harbour Bridge for the lead and my aunt and grandmother and mother for the cadmium.

18:51 Shirley had the museum and then she bought, with my grandmother, the lease here on number 15, two houses away from here, and then she sold that back to the Department of Housing for a large sum of money.

*Now we will talk about the boarding houses in a second.*

Sorry, you didn't ask me about Shirley I could give you a lot more.

*Half a tape on Shirley is great, we needed that.*

19:20 She was my aunt, and that is one thing I had going for me, that she was my aunt. I used to say people, I used to say, 'Do you know Shirley Ball?' and if they smiled I would say, 'That's my aunt.' If they didn't smile I'd just keep talking. Harry did that once, Harry her husband, he jumped into a taxi, he was waiting at the bus stop and this man said, 'Look, the buses are running late, share a taxi.' Harry was fairly mean with money and the man said, 'Come on get in.' So Harry got in there and the gentleman was talking about local things and he said, 'That bitch, Shirley Ball,' and Harry said, 'I don't know her,' and he is married to her.

*Thanks for that. Now you mentioned that your father was a born pessimist tell me why you made that comment?*

20:04 I think because of his upbringing, his mother spoilt him rotten, took him from one school to another, and he couldn't do anything wrong. Then he met my mother and my mother was a very strong lady, a bit like Shirley, not as well-known as Shirley. He would say, 'You'll never get a parking spot outside the house,' and he never would. I am the other way, I create them and most of the time there is a parking spot. I remember when we won the Games, the Olympics, and I took thirty-five thousand dollars that night because I was involved in the bid and I took a gamble. I remember two rangers walking home from Circular Quay and in a foam Esky I had thirty-five thousand. And his comments were: my mother loved counting the money and then she'd forget where she hid it, but that is another story. I remember him saying, 'Remember what happened to Bondy.' That was only a oncer. Then I did the tickertape for the city and that was another story, forty-five thousand dollars for the day, but that has all gone.

*How did you make so much money - did you place bets?*

21:19 No, because I came up with an idea many years ago for tourists to guide themselves around The Rocks on a audio tape and that was before it happened anywhere else in the world. They had it in art galleries, they had it at Alcatraz in America then, so I had this concept. My son, my number one son, Kurt, I locked him in the room here and gave him food and beer for six months and he wrote the history of the foreshores, which is the rum rebellion, the sacred sites, through the gardens with all the sound effects and we had it recorded, wonderful recording. Then he escaped and when he came back a year later I locked him back in the room again and he wrote one on The Rocks. It is wonderful, that all history.



22:11 When we first launched it to the general public down at Circular Quay we had a big boat, a friend gave us a ship, the Lowenbrau and Hahn gave us beer and everyone else, but then the general public didn't want it, so we did it for schools. Then I sold at two outlets at Circular Quay, it took me eight months to get it passed by Sydney Council, never been done before out in the open. I sold cruise tickets and I sold walking tours, not many, but I did it for schools. But then I happened to get involved in the bid for the Olympic Games and I sold merchandise, I was the first official merchandiser for the bid. The night they were going to announce it I bought up all the stock I could from all over Sydney and I had two stands and I got a generator and we had staff, and we had family, and from Tuesday to Friday I didn't sleep. The night we won it I was up on a stand with hand wavers, waving like Laurie Lawrence at the swimming and I looked down and I would just be holding a stick, all the flags would be gone. We won, as we all know, the Olympics and I said, 'Look out,' and they just swarmed us and we sold every bit of stock we had. That was something like four in the morning. I arranged for the T-shirts - the manufacturer who was going to manufacture them - it was a T-shirt with all the cities that won the Games, down to Sydney and three hours later they were hot off the press, they went from Rosebery to Rose Bay on to a water taxi, came down to Circular Quay and we were selling T-shirts three hours after the Olympic bid was won.

24:01 That was good for a while, we had a lot of fun, then three days later I had the whole town for the tickertape, for the merchandise. One bit of good advice Shirley gave me - and I remember going around the city with Wayne McKenzie, he still works for the Council - and I said, 'I'd like outside the Queen Victoria Building, on the end there,' great, I had that. I said, 'I'd like Wynyard,' and I had Wynyard. I had a little lane next to Australia Square in George Street and I said, 'Oh no, that is sloping, I will go and see the management,' and they gave me the whole front of Australia Square. I had Circular Quay, I had all these outlets for the tickertape selling merchandise and it was worrying me. I said to Shirley, 'It is like a general with too many fronts, I can't contain them.' I only had three days, I had prop sets being made, I had stalls, I had ten security guards, I had an armoured car, I had staff and I had a family member in charge of each one and I said, 'It is like a general, I'll have to pull it back a bit.' Shirley used to run The Rocks-Argyle Celebration which was absolutely fantastic and this is where I got it, I am so much like her, she ran that. 25:22 I had to pull back, she gave me good advice and I pulled back. That day I thought I would have had about seventy thousand dollars in the tin and I opened the tin up the next day with the security guard company and I only had forty-five thousand but that doesn't matter, I don't

know if I ever made money, I think I might have lost money but that is life, I am a bit of a gambler and a risk-taker.

25:44 Then when the Olympics came along they didn't want me around, so they got rid of me. I fought Frank Sartor and took out a defamation against Frank Sartor because he wanted to give me one outlet for two outlets and that to me didn't add up, so I took out a defamation against Frank. Not as Lord Mayor because it would have went on with the rest of the other ones he had lined up against him. Finally I got, I believe, justice and they gave me a street kiosk up outside Governor Phillip and Governor Macquarie Tower and a little bit of money to keep me satisfied. I had that for twelve months and I took it from nothing and it was in a write-up in the *Telegraph* food magazines because I did something totally different people had never expected. It was only small and they used to line up like twenty or thirty deep to go in, but that is another story. Then the Olympics, that was an other story as well.

26:44 I was an entrepreneur without knowing about it because when I was small I had red hair, freckles, and I was very, very shy. If Shirley was here, and she was the only other person and people didn't believe her, that I used to stutter, I could not say the word, 'thank you.' Every other word I had a mental block and I used to stutter a lot, and someone gave me a little tram conductor's hat and bag and I used to stand up here at the tram stop, and I used to sell these tram tickets before people got on the tram. Now I thought I was selling the proper tickets, they knew they weren't, I've still got that book with some tickets left. I used to sell chokos and papers, I was an entrepreneur. I was quiet up to the age of about twenty-one, I was fairly quiet and shy, not now, as you can imagine.

27:48 END OF TAPE MP-FH3 SIDE A

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27:50 START OF TAPE MP-FH3 SIDE B

*Now Brian, your father worked on the waterfront, what do you know about the life and conditions on the waterfront that he would have had to live through?*

28:04 Well it was very, very harsh because in those days they would have to wake up before six a.m., turn on 2KY and listen to their badge draw. That was fairly quick because they had so many to get through and they would mention the wharf where they were working and the badge numbers and that is how he used to find out where the jobs were

when he first started. Then they were in the papers a bit later on.

28:32 He worked mainly by himself, a couple of times he joined a gang and he would be in a gang, but he was a bit of a loner. But in the gang they always covered for one or two, each shift one or two would have the day off and they would cover for them and that was just a known practice. They would start in the morning at seven o'clock, then the next shift would be three o'clock, and then midnighters. They would unload cement, they would unload potatoes, they would have timber on the floating barges to unload, it was cold, it was wet, it was dirty. I remember they went on strike, which they went on strike many times, because of the bird droppings. So they went on strike over that and they got an allowance for the bird droppings because when they were inside the warehouses down here.

29:35 I remember going down one day to borrow the car from my father on a Sunday and they were sending back vats, wooden vats of Scotch, to go back to Scotland to be refilled and sent here. Now they were supposed to leave a small amount of Scotch in the barrels but as I went down to get my key off my father these wharfies were wheeling wheelbarrows down all over the place and my father and another man were holding up these vats, or the kegs, and draining every last bit of Scotch out them. They had it in billy-cans and milk-cans and it was Scotch that you broke down nine per cent water to one per cent Scotch, so you can imagine how drunk they were.

30:19 My father was the nicest guy in the world and he would drink beer and it wouldn't affect him, if he had a spirit, a rum or anything like that, he would bang doors and scream and shout. It is something I still can't cope with when people do that, I can't cope with that, because my father would just turn from a Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde. He would give his shirt off his back, loan them money he would never ever see again. But he was also weak, he could never throw anyone out of this house, if they were behind with their rent he would go and buy them a beer over in the pub or loan them money to pay my mother rent. But he also was a bit cunning because he used to loan people money and enjoyed a beer and when he got his wages he would give it to my mother and she would give him money, plus she would get the board from the boarders in this house. Then when she put the pay-slip down he would take the pay-slip and then he would change it over for a higher one, so in a few weeks time he would put the old pay-slip in there and when she looked at a hundred and forty-five pounds he might have earned a hundred and seventy pounds, so he would keep the difference. He used to hide rum and we still have got a couple of bottles of rum here, but I found after he died that he would hide them under the bathtub.

31:44 It was mainly because he wasn't well, he had dermatitis and in the morning his whole bed used to be full of skin. He had bad varicose veins, which I have as well. He was a very strong person. I also have his haircut as well, I was bald at nineteen, just like him. He got hit by a roll of paper on the waterfront, newsprint, which is a fairly large roll of newsprint, and they said he wouldn't last the night and he finished up lasting the night, he lasted another twenty years. But my father couldn't drive past the hotels, if we went for a Sunday drive, which we did, to go to a hotel because the hotels were closed around here on a Sunday he would always stop at a hotel. He would bring out a lemonade, a pink lemonade, and a bag of chips to keep us quiet.

32:40 The dog used to ride on the running-board, in fact that photograph right behind me now of the Austin two-seater with a dicky-seat at the back, where you used to put your suitcases, that is me at six months old and my sister outside this house. He had an Austin two-seater and then he bought a Hupmobile and had a Hupmobile. A Hupmobile was a bigger car like that, very old-fashioned, where you'd get out and use the handle to crank it to start it, he had one of those. Then he had a Toyota Crown, which in those days was the deluxe, four cylinders, the windows went up and down, this was 1964. You could even work the radio from the back seat. He was a character and he was a fantastic guy.

*Now what were the family politics, Brian?*

33:43 Politics, funny I spent most of my time with my grandmother, or my aunt or my uncle. My sister and my mother used to talk a hundred miles an hour and my father never talked a great deal, you'd have to really get things out of him. He was a wit, a very, very witty man, wouldn't say much. He'd go into hotels, start an argument and walk out again, a very witty man. Being shy and quiet and stuttering and not doing very well at school, I never did well at school, I was lazy, I spent time with my grandmother. She was the ballast of my life because when you are boy you need a female image and my grandmother was that, more so than Shirley or anyone else. My grandmother was very caring, a very smart business person, I took after her in business. Flair for doing things I take after Shirley because I have a flair for that as well.

*Were your parents Labor voters?*

34:51 Oh Labor yes. My grandmother was the first Communist I ever met in my life and my grandfather was a Communist as well. They were Labor right through, wouldn't matter what Labor did to them, like now, they still vote Labor, it is a fact of life when you are on the waterfront you had to vote Labor.

*Now Brian, you were born in the house, 11 Lower Fort Street, for those people who don't know this house can you describe what it was like in your early years?*

35:22 Well this row of terrace houses that I live in now it is called Milson Terrace - it was built in 1896 and it is supposed to be the finest row of terrace houses in all of the country. We moved in in 1946. My grandmother, who had the lease on the house up the road, she bought it and it was a brothel when she bought that and had quite a lot of trouble cleaning it up. The woman who lived here, her and her husband ran it as a boarding house and it was very neat and very tidy. This day, I don't know their names I have forgotten their names, they went up to the shop and she said she'd talk to the shopkeeper a bit longer and her husband said he would come home and have a cup of tea waiting for her. When she finally got home, walked into the ground floor flat just below us, there was her husband hanging from the rafters in the back kitchen. Well, she went hysterical and went screaming out of the house and never went back for anything, furniture or clothes. My grandmother found out about it and told my mother and my mother bought the lease here in 1946. My grandmother was a bit jealous because it didn't need a great deal of work done to it and they ran it as a boarding house. That is when it was under the Maritime Services Board. I was six months old and we would have over the years hundreds of men live in this house. We would have up to twelve, sometimes fourteen, men as boarders, two or three to a room.

36:55 The top room I can always remember - this little space above us now was 'Apples' and Charlie, they worked on the waterfront. They must have been gay and Charlie was a big man and 'Apples' was a smaller fatter man - he used to give him hell, they cooked out on the landing, and they were just like husband and wife. The room that we are in now - Mr and Mrs Murphy lived in this flat we are in now. They caused a lot of trouble, they complained a lot and that. I remember being so shy I came up with a poem which quite amazed me. I have to tell you the poem because I thought it was quite funny and when you are six or seven to get revenge on this Mrs Murphy who made things hell for us, but my mother was strong enough to get over the top of her but it was still trouble in the house. The poem was:

*'Ooha Ooha,  
Mrs Murphy fell down a sewer,  
Pulled the chain  
and up she came  
in a chocolate aeroplane.'*

I have never forgotten that, for me to say that to myself it just helped.

38:08 In the other room over there was Mr and Mrs Lewis, they were lovely. He was from England and he was very skinny and she was fat, and they lived in that room. The four of us lived in that little flat on the ground floor. Then at some stage we took over the lower ground floor, where we used to lease that out as well. I have lived in every room bar one of them here. Because my father had dermatitis he used to sleep in a single bed and my mother and my sister and myself used to sleep for a while in a double bed and then I got into a smaller bed. My father would never ever throw anyone out if they were behind in the rent, I would have to help my mother if they didn't pay the rent, we'd take all their clothes or furniture and put it out on the footpath and throw them out.

39:04 I remember, there was another guy who lived upstairs, he was from Europe, a very wiry, strong young guy, Mario. We used to play, my sister and me used to play with him, and we used to tie each other up and I loved getting tied up. When I went to Lance Kindergarten they used to have a nap time and they used to have canvas little stretchers, and if you played up they used to tie you in, so I used to play up a bit just to get tied in and I must have liked it because I was four then and that is how I liked getting tied upstairs. In the other room there used to be Karl, a big German, he could get a threepence and just bend it with his two fingers.

39:46 When I look back now and I think of the hundreds of men who lived in this house, in my grandmother's house, in Uncle Peter's house, Clydebank, Bligh House, in Shirley's place, selling newspapers on the merchant boats, selling papers on the P&O boats when I was young, being shy and quiet, I was lucky to have survived not being molested because I was in rooms with total strangers from all over the world who had a lot of problems. A lot of them hanged themselves because they were away from their families, trying to learn the language and start a new life. I did go to a clairvoyant three years ago and she told me I was molested when I was a child and I said, 'Well I can't remember and I don't really care, but what a strange thing to tell me.' Then I looked back and I thought my God, I should have been, I was in rooms with strange people coming and going from all over the world, I was a candidate, so I don't know if I was or not.

*Were they all seamen, these people?*

40:48 No, some of them were, mainly Millers Point-Dawes Point is for the Maritime, the people that worked on the ferries, worked on the wharves, worked as coal lumpers, or people just passing through. Like I said, most of them got off here when they came over by

passage, the ten dollars from England or that, and the first place they'd reach would be Sydney and The Rocks, the second place would be Kings Cross and then Paddington, so it was a stepping stone. We had a young guy up in the top room up there and he was quiet and shy and he was from England and now he is the captain of one of the ferries down at Circular Quay. We had hundreds and hundreds of them, they don't float through like they used to.

41:37 We are people from Dawes Point and Dawes Point runs down to the Hero of Waterloo Hotel, from there down is Dawes Point, around from there up is Millers Point and we really didn't mix with the people from Millers Point. Shirley never got on well with them, she had a name for them which I didn't like the name at all, but then she had names for other people, which I didn't like. She used to call them 'boofhead country' and if you didn't live here for twenty years you were a 'blow-in', well it is still a funny thing to say to people and a lot of people still say it, 'I'm only here for thirty years, I'm a blow-in.' We didn't mix and they weren't allowed to mix with us because we ran boarding houses, we had people coming through, they were in transit.

*So did the people of Dawes Point feel a little superior to the people in Millers Point?*

42:30 Well, maybe they did because of the size of the houses and they were making money out of their houses, boarding houses, where they weren't, they were families up there. But it is a hard place to raise a family.

*Now if you were a boarder in a boarding house what kind of facilities would the owners provide, would they change their linen and that sort of thing?*

42:49 What we did, every Tuesday we changed their linen, which meant there was a lot of washing. A hell of a lot of washing in those days, it was in a copper, it was wood, stirring it, there was the old wringer. There was a lot of cleaning as well because we also cleaned their room, we polished their floors and in those days it was on your hands and knees, there wasn't the polisher. Runners down the hall, doing the lino or the wood beside it. It was getting the brass rods on every step, taking them out and cleaning them. If I wanted to take a day off school my mother would tell me I would have to stay at home and work if she knew I wasn't sick.

43:30 So I would have to work, I'd have to clean the rods, I'd have to polish, I'd have to clean cupboards. To go into strange men's rooms, and we had keys all the time, open them and all their personal things are there. You strip their sheets off which could be smelly but in those days you didn't even think about it. You would clean the floor, sweep it, polish it, it

was a hard life.

*Did you find any strange objects in these men's rooms?*

44:02 Probably did but I never took a great deal of notice. It was good to see how men live, it probably did build my character a bit. I remember in my grandmother's place she had a young Greek sea captain and this night she heard a lot of voices in the hallway and it could have been one of the many men so she went to sleep. About two o'clock in the morning she woke up when she heard moans coming from upstairs and she went up there and knocked on the door, no answer, used her spare key and there was the young guy in bed, blood all over the sheets, it was all up the walls and everywhere. What had happened was, she didn't realise until after they took him away, that this young Greek guy was saving up enough money to bring his wife and family over from Greece, that is what they did, and after his caller had left guilt got the better of the young guy and he pulled down his trousers and sliced off his penis.

45:08 My grandmother who was strong, but like me she didn't like cleaning up blood and that, got Shirley her daughter to come down. She told me she walked in the next morning up into his room and she thought she had to clean it up for her mother and it was hard, blood all over the sheets and up the wall, and as she got the sheet from end to end she said, 'Please don't let it fall out,' and lucky it didn't fall out. He came back two weeks later to his room and Mum Ryan said, 'I'm sorry, I've leased your room but here is your bags and good luck.' I don't know whatever he told his wife and family when they finally caught up with him that something was missing.

*What a horrific story, unbelievable.*

There was a lot of those.

*Now the house is four storeys, is it?*

45:58 We'll go back to the house. It is a four storey house with a lower ground floor and it has got two rooms down there, which are quite dark and that is the basement. In the old days that is where the maid would have been, where they would have done the cooking. These large houses were built for the merchants, where they had the view and the high ground. Beside each fireplace they used to have a little bell and they would ring the bell and the maid would come up. Not like Shirley's place because in between Shirley's ground floor and lower ground floor is a little room, it is halfway between the two floors, and that's where the maid used to be and when they rang the bell she would come up, so that is why they nicknamed the maids 'Tweenies' because they were in-between floors. Here, I don't



know, the maids must have slept in the bottom of the houses down here because we haven't got any small room for the maid's room. The next floor is where they would have had their formal entertainment, which would have been their lounge room and dining room. The verandahs were open in those days back and front. This room here is where they would have slept, that verandah would have been open as well. Then upstairs. So these were fairly prominent merchants, they were people who were on the stage, they were flamboyant people. But as you go round Millers Point the houses get smaller and smaller and they are for the working class people who worked mainly on the ships.

*As head tenants in this area were you kind of looked down on, looked up to, what was the general population's opinion of you and this row of terraces?*

47:42 The other people referred to us as business people just trying to earn a living because nearly everyone in Dawes Point had a boarding house which they leased out and paid rent to the Maritime Services Board. There was a stigma of living in The Rocks, we call it all The Rocks or Millers Point-Dawes Point, because when people asked you where you lived, up to only fifteen or twenty years ago, and you say The Rocks they say, 'Oh, that terrible place.' But now everyone says, 'Aren't you lucky to live here, you are very lucky to live here,' well, we have been lucky to live here. We have put a lot back in, mainly myself and Shirley, or Shirley mainly, put a lot back into The Rocks as well and if we can we will.

*Now a lot of people describe Millers Point as a village, what do you think are the attributes that make it a village?*

48:40 Well, it is Australia's first village, it is where it all started from, The Rocks is the birthplace of the nation. The village is the people, you can have a village and you can have yuppies, or you can have different types of people, but it is the characters who still live there. It is so sad that they are dying out, one-by-one, they are not moving out, they are dying out. As they get older a lot of them live in fear, they live in their two bedroom units, I don't know if you have seen them as you have been around, they are not really aware what is going on and they don't want to know. All they want to do is just live their life out where they have for many, many years. Because they live in fear, they hear rumours that they are going to sell the houses, they are going to do this and that and people who spread rumours like that they are totally wrong and are affecting people's emotions.

49:33 The worst thing that can happen to anyone when they get older is to move. You know, they can have family die around them but to move is awful. It is a village, we have a Village Green that used to have a fence all the way around it and only the merchants were allowed in, because the poor people weren't, it had a lock. But when World War II came up

they pulled down the fence and anyone could go in there and they melted the fence down for ships and all that.

50:03 I always wondered, and people told me and I've heard on some tapes, the Tree of Knowledge and I finely found out where it was in a photograph - it is on the far end of the Village Green, up near the Lord Nelson, there's a tree there. What it was in the old days the people, mainly men, came out of their houses because they didn't have TV of course, radios, newspapers were hard to get, and they would stand around that Tree of Knowledge and talk about the day's affairs and at a certain time they'd all go home. That is when they had a coal lumpers' room across the road there, just across from the Village Green, where the Community Centre is, that is where the coal lumpers' place used to be.

*That is where the Abraham Mott Hall is now? What is a coal lumpers' room?*

50:54 Coal lumpers, they worked on the coal boats and that was very dangerous and dirty work, they wouldn't be able to wash the coal from their skin for days and days. That is where they used to meet to get picked up for jobs, in the coal lumpers' room. Where it is now, the Abraham Mott Hall, is where they quarried Observatory Hill and got the stone to build all the houses and churches and hotels around here, so they didn't have far to go to get the stone.

*Now what was life like in the pubs at Millers Point?*

51:30 We had something like fourteen hotels. The Captain Cook was always full of thugs, heavies, you could only walk in there if you knew someone in there. They probably tolerated me because they knew I was a local, but I was Dawes Point, but they never really liked me. It was full of thugs and heavies. I tell you one guy who was the worst thug of all, Danny Chubb, he lived down in High Street. He was four years older than me but he was a real thug, at school he would do terrible things to people, kids. I remember as a seventeen and a half, I happened to be in the Hero Hotel and I came out with a friend and Danny Chubb walked past, and he grabbed me and he gave me two black eyes and a broken nose with one punch, that is the type of person he was, my nose has never been the same. Six years later they shot him outside the Lance Kindergarten, the school. I believe and I asked a paramedic who came to my daughter-in-law, who lives in High Street and he told me the end of the story. He said, 'I haven't been here for many, many years. I came here for Daniel Chubb when he was shot,' and this is going back like thirty years ago, and he said, 'He was shot.'

52:54 I said, 'Is it true that his mother raced out of the house and said not to touch him,

he's got gold teeth?' and he said it was true. He said what happened was: it was a hit job, they put two bullets into his chest, walked up to him and put another one in his head, and he said, 'I was the one who covered him up,' well, he was the one that broke my nose and gave me two black eyes, he was a real thug, he left a lot of money. In those days the heavies, or the crims, in mainly the Captain Cook they had decency. If anyone was dealing drugs or belting up their wives they would go and knock on the door and give them forty-eight hours to clean up their act or they would be back.

53:35 Those were the days, where the police in my days, you could not get a policeman down at St George Police Station, that is when it was on the corner of Argyle and George, because they all walked up Argyle Street and up the little stairs and they were in the Glenmore Hotel. Those days the police would stop you on the road and if you had any beer they'd give you a kick up the rear-end and take your beer, and they would drink it, of course. They were tough in those days, they were like police should be.

*Was there a lot of crime generally in the area, would you say?*

54:13 No, there is more crime now. In those days if you did have gang fights it was one-on-one, a fist fight. I was never a fighter, the last fight I ever had was the one I lost with Danny Chubb and he only took one punch. I have lived here nearly all my life and it wasn't a tough place, in those days they had rules. Now they have knives and they kick and it is not the same. And you didn't have drugs in those days.

*Now you live very close to the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Brian, you can see it from the window, what sort of activities did you have around the Bridge as a child?*

54:53 I used to play in the park and I used to play in the dirt and that is why I am full of lead. We used to play cricket over there in the park, that was the only bit of grass we had around here. Funny you know, I met a lot of people who used to illegally climb over the arch, I did a lot of things but I never ever did that. I used to with my little friends get into the lift and university students would run the lift up to the pylon, up to the roadway, and then you'd walk up the stairs to the pylon. We used to wrestle with him to press the lift buttons, whoever was on, and the lift would go up and down and then we'd sneak up the back way to the pylon where they had the white cats, which was quite smelly and dirty up there and the woman ran the pylon. We used to play a lot under the Bridge.

55:40 I remember, I had a little eight foot fibreglass boat which myself and some friends used to row under the wharves and across over the Bridge to Lavender Bay and you'd get all the boats going past. None of us could swim, many of them would see a floating

mattress and jump on it and row out and the mattress would start to sink. We had another one, Billy Carr, he still lives here up at Darling House, lived here all his life, he used to go up to the Bridge and the train tunnel there. We used to have trams going over the Bridge in those days and he used to lay in the middle of the track and let the tram go over him. I used to, with other kids, jump on the toasters, the old trams along here, I would jump on the trams and jump off until one day I saw a guy jump off and slip, went under the tram and it chopped his leg off.

56:37 All the streets here and in George Street still are paved with wooden blocks, they made out of blue gum tree. In the old days people used to come out of their houses, probably before my time, and pull the wooden blocks up because it made fantastic firewood. They used to have little block boys that lived around here, orphans that lived in the little streets and they were known as block boys and they would push a wooden wheelbarrow around and replace the wooden blocks the next day. It was awfully hard to ride a push bike and I only had a girl's push bike, I never had a boy's bike. I used to ride it and when you got it caught in the tram track you could only go so far dead straight before you fell off. But then I was the first boy in Australia to go on the P&O boats, *Oriana* and *Canberra*, selling papers. Used to sneak in the Seamen's Mission and watch the movies on a Sunday night because we didn't have TV. I remember the old Sydney Park Hyatt here - I stood out the front, tears rolling down my cheeks because the building was on fire and I thought it was full of boys' push bikes because it was a toy factory and it was burning down. There I was watching the firemen, that was devastating, doing that. I did a lot of things selling chokos, newspapers, donating my money to the SP bookmaker up the road who had the cockatoo out the front, it took me a while to learn that you can't win that way.

58:18 END OF TAPE MP-FH3 SIDE B

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00:00 START OF TAPE MP-FH4 SIDE A

00:05 Tape Identification

*Brian, tell me about your school days.*

00:18 Well, like I said, I went to Lance Kindergarten and then I went to Fort Street Primary. I was very lazy, very shy and that is probably why, and because I stuttered, I didn't do very well at school. The only time I was popular is - my father always gave me money,

some people can buy love by giving money, it was another way of putting of your arm around someone and saying, 'I love you, son.' So when he gave me money I would buy lollies and when I bought lollies I was popular, until the white bag of lollies was all gone. I went to Fort Street and we used to go down to Leonard's, which was a fruit shop near the Lord Nelson Hotel and we would buy our ice-cream with our flavour and our malt. Then we would go to the fish shop, which is still there, Fish on the Rocks, beside the Captain Cook and we used to buy our chips from there. Mash up all the ice-cream and the malt and the flavouring and dip hot chips in it. Then we would go to Marie's milk bar, that is where the cafe is on the corner of Kent Street there. I saw Marie about a year ago and she looks wonderful and we thought she was old then, Marie and the milk bar. It was Holly's and Holly had a greengrocery shop, he was a bald-headed man.

01:52 The shop was across from the Lord Nelson Hotel and I remember going there and you would get your biscuits, they were in a round glass jar on the counter, and they would put the biscuits in a brown paper bag. There were tins behind, all on a large shelf, well I've got one of his biscuit barrels inside from his shop, which is quite special.

I went to Fort Street and then I went to Rozelle Technical College, which is not a high school but a technical college. I went to first year and for some reason I pulled my socks up and I repeated first year and I did reasonably well. I remember, one of the first days I was there this young boy in my class said to me, 'I'm going to kick you,' and I just looked at him, being shy and laughed because he only had thongs on and I thought if he was going to kick me he is not going to do much harm.

02:46 I left school at first year, I went and I worked in the supermarket at Grace Brothers in Chatswood, bagging potatoes on a Tuesday, potatoes in brown paper bags, which was quite an exciting day. Then I became a window dresser for Farmers and Grace Brothers and I did that for about three or four years. I was very good at it but it was very difficult learning the trade because the head window dresser used to say, 'Pass me a brown umbrella,' and I would pass him a dark green one, 'Pass me a red one,' and I'd pass him a maroon. He would say, 'It's the wrong colour,' and I would say to him because I had probably the gift of the gab then without knowing it, 'I was just watching that beautiful girl walk past, I'm sorry, you take all the umbrellas and pick your own.'

03:36 I was colour blind and no one ever found out. In those days they had a saying 'blue and green should never be seen', well that didn't apply to me, my windows were very, very colourful. That is why I am artistic now and even a friend a couple of months ago wanted to

put a stall in the Body, Mind and Spirit Show down at Darling Harbour and I said, 'Well, you give me what you've got in posters and this is what I need,' and it won first prize, the best stand out of the whole lot, so I've still got it. I wasn't gay but when I worked for Farmers there was a guy there named Colin, his nickname was Cora, and he worked at the Jewel Box, up at Kings Cross, which is like *Les Girls*. Half a hour before he went home he used to get in front of the mirror and say, 'Darling, you are rotten to the core, let's go.' I remember, we were all over at the State Theatre this day, all the window dressers in the State Theatre, not holding hands because they were gay and I wasn't, and up on the screen handwritten, 'Would all Farmers' window dressers please go back to work.' Well, there was a stampede because the Display Manager rang them and said, 'Put it up on your screen and get all the window-dressers back to work.' I did that.

04:53 I did that and after that I went and worked for Sargents Pies in Darlinghurst and that was a real eye-opener, Sargents Pies, they had their own butchers there, They were famous in the old days, I used to go with my mother and my aunt used to take my sister and I to Sargents and that was a big day out, to have a Sargents' pie and a cup of tea, or a milkshake. I worked there. They also had a bakery there called Cobbitty Farm and I worked as a driver for pies and then bread. I have a knack of building things up and I finished building the run up where they cut it into two. Then they wanted a rep, I became a rep. Then I became a manager of the bakery in Taree at twenty-one years of age, only first year of schooling, terrible speller, improved since but not a hundred per cent, good on figures and I took it from a twenty-four thousand pound loss to sixty-thousand pounds in two years. It was only an old house the bakery where they put me in charge of other bakeries, I was a trouble-shooter for Cobbitty Farm, and it was bought out by Fielders.

06:12 The best thing I ever did was leave Millers Point, my beloved Dawes Point, because I had three sons, Kurt, Brock and Todd, and they would not have turned out as well as what they have. Even now, if you go around at night here there is gangs, groups, I should say, of young fellows, mainly hanging around the corners, kicking footballs. We used to stand outside the post office, they still do, they've been doing that for a hundred years around here. They wouldn't have survived because in the last twenty years you've got drugs, you've got other things as temptation, we didn't have that so much in those days. Went to Taree and managed the bakery, plus I was in charge of other bakeries, Kempsey, Wauchope. Then I went to Orange and managed the bakery there and Dubbo.

07:13 Then my marriage broke up, my daughter was born three years before that, and my

wife and daughter and sons left, she just got up and left. I was devastated, there I am in Orange and I was devastated, in a new house, so I did something foolish, which I don't mind talking about, I took forty-two Mogadons and lay down in a park to die and wrote a note. Something made me get into the truck I had, it was a bread truck, and I drove back into town and collapsed outside the doctor's and they put a stomach pump on me. My eldest son Kurt came back, and then my other two boys came back and they stayed up there. I remember my parents came up, that was on the Friday it happened, and they came up on the weekend when they found out. They sat beside the bed but they never mentioned what happened to me. My sister came up and went a hundred miles an hour, like they normally do in your ear, and I told her to go away I didn't need all that.

08:20 I remember going back to work on the Monday and there was no support in those days, there was no back up, no nothing, it was just you, if you survived you survived. I went back to work and then I found out about a course and there is an old saying 'when the student is ready the teacher will appear', well I found out about this course and it was run by a woman and seven other women I didn't know had enrolled for a weekend course, which I liked - the odds of seven women and one guy. I remember she said, 'Here's a piece of paper, I'd like you to draw where you are in life at present,' and I used all dark crayons. She said, 'Put it aside and now we will be in a life with a passion.' I remember people brought out yellows and blues and I had a light bulb equals dollars, dollars equal security, security equals holidays, the island with a palm tree, and it went down until the second last one was the house with a family outside. The last one was the detonator, TNT, and it had 'No more guilt,' and from then on I never had any guilt, I wiped that.

09:43 That helped me so much, that course and she said to me, 'Some people will dream and some people won't sleep tonight because of the course.' We went back the following day and when I went back the dream came back to me and I can't remember many dreams, not like my wife does now. She said, 'Share it,' and I said, 'I was walking through a paddock and there was a little boy in a mud pile. I went over to him, he was only about four or five, and the mud just swallowed him up. I went down on my hands and knees and dug him out and he wasn't breathing, so I held him up and hit him and he coughed up all this mud.' She said, 'That was you, you fell down that big dark hole and you didn't want to be that person any more so you coughed up all that muck.'

10:26 That was probably the turning point, that helped me, and from then on I did all the things I should have done. I was married at nineteen and then I had ten years of working,

looking after my children, I've always been a good father, and chasing women, as I should have done earlier. I had a great time and I finished up getting my present wife by putting an ad in a paper. I didn't have to, I just did it for fun because I always had plenty of women. I had, 'Forty-eight year old businessman prefers champagne to beer, would like to meet woman for outings.' Two hundred and nineteen replied to one ad and it was quite hard work. What it was – it was my voice on a tape when they rang this number up, they got my voice and I was laughing and I said, 'Look, I've had three attempts of putting this message on, I'm nearly six foot tall, could have more hair, if you want to leave your name and phone number.' Well I got two hundred and nineteen replies, so it was quite hectic after that. That is how I met my present wife, we've been married for about eight years.

*That is a most unusual way to find one.*

11:48 I have done a lot of things, I haven't made any money, I've been up and down, I'm an entrepreneur, didn't work for a year or two years.

*Just before we leave the bakery business - what was the Ned Kelly Pie?*

12:01 Oh, the Ned Kelly Pie. I also was the general manager of a pie company in Orange and it was taking ten thousand dollars a week and it was down a lane, that is the retail, not the wholesale side of it, and I took it to a twenty-one thousand dollars each week by putting in a bread shop. What it was, we had bacon and cheese rolls and as the pies came through the system on the machine the pastry is in a shell and then they would squirt the meat in and then put a lid on top – well, I left the lid off and I broke an egg on top and put a handful of grated cheese and bacon on top and baked them. The egg sales went through the roof, the Egg Board found out and Max Marks of Marks and Sparks, he got involved. They flew me down to Sydney, I was on *Good Morning Australia*, in the *Telegraph*, talk-back shows, I was famous for about forty-eight hours, showed every other pastry cook and baker in Australia how to make the open pie, they are still out there, so I was famous for a while. I don't want to be famous, I just want to have money. Yes, that has happened to me a few times, I've been on TV a few times.

*So when did you actually return to Millers Point?*

13:20 Well, I was away for a period of about nine years and I came back to Millers Point and that was after the landladies' battle. I am sorry in one way I wasn't here to support my parents because it was a very, very emotional thing. When you think you have been here since 1946, ran a boarding house, and then the Department of Housing takes over and they say 'you are all out.' You have to hand back your leases: you have two choices, hand them



back and you are out on the street or they will send you to places like Mount Druitt, St Mary's, places like that, so it was an emotional thing and it worked with a lot of them. Now my mother, who ran the boarding house, my father didn't have much say, she didn't want to go in with Shirley, her sister, because they didn't see eye-to-eye, they didn't talk, so my mother handed back the lease of this house and gave them all the furniture in the house, got nothing for it, and became a tenant, just a tenant. She was given, I think, six or seven dollars per flat to still maintain the house, like clean it, toilet paper and all that, and that was fine because she was still in the house that she loved. Now she didn't make any money out of it, none at all.

14:54 But then Shirley and the other group of landladies fought the government for five years and won. They have an unofficial act in parliament called the 'Shirley Ball Act' and they won and they still have four years left on their leases. A lot of them have handed back their leases, or the Housing Department has bought back the leases in the majority of cases, some have sold it to other people. Aunt Shirley, not long ago had the lease on number 15, two houses from us here, and this was amazing because her and I were very close, especially when she was dying and she said, 'Look I need the money so I can get it now and give it to my children,' people thought she gave me money but I knew I got nothing out of her when she died and that didn't worry me because I knew what was going to happen. She only wanted seventy thousand dollars and it was quite funny and I said, 'Shirley, when he comes,' the gentleman, I won't say who, 'you go for ninety thousand and you'll get seventy thousand.' When he came he said, 'Make it a hundred and fifty, Shirley,' and she started to write it out and he said, 'I want you to make it two hundred thousand,' and a few days later she got a cheque for two hundred thousand dollars. I said to her, 'You wanted for your museum up there a hundred and ten thousand for the contents,' which she was going to sell to me out of the goodness of her heart. You have to know your opponent, she was my aunt but she was also an opponent and I knew her. I said to her once, 'I've got something that you haven't got,' and she said, 'What's that?' I said, 'The link between you and the rest of your family,' because no one on the other side of the family would talk to her at all.

*Do you know why that animosity existed?*

16:50 Because of her nature. Her nature was - if she put pen to paper, look out, she would give you heaps, tear you to strips. She was one of the worst people, like 'boofhead country' up there, nicknames for people, she was vicious, absolutely vicious. I remember once, when I first came back here I was two doors up in a house and there was a party in the backyard

and Shirley was there and she said to this gentleman, a solicitor, 'This is my nephew, he only comes to see me when he wants something,' which wasn't true. I said, 'Shirley you can go and get lost,' and I was so ropable I came inside and went back and had another go at her. Her mother used to call her the big grey horse. She was just the type of person, I don't know, it is always someone who is talented or strong like that who is in the public eye - a lot of them have got a dark side. That is sad because it now has reflected in her children, her children have got a lot of problems and that is sad, my cousins.

*What is the future for the boarding houses now, what is the current situation?*

18:19 The current situation is that the boarding houses are mansions, they are beautiful houses, like this house would have to be worth probably three, four million dollars alone. They can't do anything internally to them because of the Heritage. They did that five doors up, in the same terrace house, they spent nearly three hundred thousand, ripped out walls, ceilings, beautiful ceiling roses, they put in false ceilings. The room that we are in now up there is a shower and kitchen. To open up the back verandah for Heritage is fine but they destroyed the inside of it. None of the ceiling roses are there because it is holding the plumbing. They have spent two hundred and forty thousand internally, not counting what they did to the outside of the building, the roof and the whole lot, and they get probably about fifty or sixty dollars a floor, you can't justify the return of two hundred and forty dollars and spend over four hundred thousand dollars and destroy the heritage.

19:29 What is happening now is that I am sure, in time they would like people like myself, who is outspoken, Shirley, who has passed away, and other people not to be here. One day this government or another government will have to sell them and if they do they will only sell it once, you can only sell it once and then the money is gone, that is when Millers Point-Dawes Point will lose its character.

19:56 I'm here and my wife was never raised in a boarding house, I am used to it. Upstairs, up where my wife first moved in, we had Dot in one small room and Dot was in her eighties, up three flights of stairs, two flights of stairs down to the toilet, never had a shower or a bath in the probably twelve years she was here. If she went to the toilet, which she would have to go to the toilet, there would be like graphite over the seat because of the dirt from her. She was a lovely old lady, we never complained, never said anything, but that is what it was like. Smell, we would open our bedroom door next to her and hold a can of spray for the smell because she used to douse herself down with eucalyptus because she thought it made her well. The room was just stacked with everything, it smelt. Like

you'd go to the door and we had the bedroom next to her and you would spray near the door. You walked down the stairs, the only way we can get to our bathroom is down one flight of stairs, we walk up two flights of stairs to go to the bedroom. We walk down four flights of stairs to go the laundry. That is why my legs are so big and strong because of going up and down stairs.

21:14 Now Mario, who was in the room above us, he was an old Polish guy, he was there for fourteen years and he was here when my wife moved in. So I had smelly Dot up there, Dorothy Duff, and we had Mario. Now Mario was a nice old guy but you couldn't understand him. He was a great old guy, he was on a walking stick. He was clean, he would go to the bathroom and he'd be there for ages. You'd have to use the same bathroom, or the toilet, after these people. I remember one day he had diarrhoea and coming down in his dressing gown he had droppings down the carpet, this is only six years ago, I put chalk mark around each one so he could find them. I knocked on his door and said, 'Mario, you go and clean your mess,' 'Oh, good, good,' so he went down. Colleen phoned me up one day and said, 'Mario is in the bathroom and has fallen on the ground, I think he is drunk.' I said, 'Okay, well leave him there for a moment, I'll be there in about twenty minutes or thirty minutes.' That is what it is like running a boarding house. She said, 'I have to get him up,' I said, 'No, leave him there, he is fine.' So I came home, 'Mario, get up, get up now, right now, come on, you're going upstairs,' and he did. You walked behind him, you made it firm and up he got and up he went.

22:43 We had a guy who lived in the bottom ground floor and somehow he had juncitivitis and his organs were coming through his stomach. I found him in the bathroom here one day. That was strange, he died and he left his furniture to me, that was probably about twelve years ago, but most of the furniture belonged to us anyway, it was our furniture. He had two wishes for his beautiful tools. He was a thief, he worked for the Maritime Services Board, and a thief will always lock doors and put bars on the windows because they worry about another thief coming in. He left his beautiful tools to a museum in Wales and he wanted no service. Like Shirley, you never get your wishes after you die, it doesn't really matter. His brother, who is a minister in Wales gave me the tools, I didn't ask for them, he said, 'We don't want them over here, keep them.' They kept him for six weeks and then they had a service. Well Shirley's wishes also weren't what she wanted but I've always said you can't rule from the grave but a lot of people think Shirley still can.

23:52 Where we are now, it has been in dispute for about four years. We have got

correspondence, we write to the Housing Department, we say we wish to clear up the living conditions where we are and six weeks, a couple of months later they write to you. They got an evaluation over six months ago and they've finally written to us last week to say that we can have the top two floors of the building, which my wife lives in fear of putting someone else up there. Now to put someone else in those two rooms, they have to put scaffolding, they have just painted the outside of the building but they never thought of how they were going to put plumbing in. They have to put scaffolding up the back, ten thousand dollars or less, putting the pipe for the sink, and this room above us would be the kitchen, and then the bedroom. They would walk out on the landing, they have a stove out on the landing but you can't cook out on the landing because of the fire hazard but they do, and our bedroom is up there. So we would walk out of our bedroom into the person who is living there, share the same bathroom.

24:59 Now my wife, and I don't blame her, and I am sure other women would not like to share a bathroom with a total stranger and the people they are putting in, who are justified to be in the Housing Department, that is what they are there for, but some of the people have got a lot of emotional problems. We have people even downstairs, a lovely guy, who got out of gaol, an older guy. He was in the backyard, he doesn't mind me saying this because he will tell you the same thing, Les said, 'I just got out of gaol, I took to a guy with an axe and killed him.' I said, 'Oh, that's fine Les, if you want anything just sing out.' He is a good old guy. His carer was down there for ages. Les went to court the other day, probably for his parole, he met his carer who was down there for probably eight or nine months, he is in court, he talked to two policemen with a knife, he's up on attempted murder, and he was a carer down there. They are the type of people they could put in up the top if they want to get nasty so they've said to me, 'You take over the top two floors but hand in your tenancy, or being a tenant of the Department of Housing, and you can have the top two levels for three hundred and seventy-five dollars a week.'

*But your mother had handed in her tenancy earlier, hadn't she?*

26:21 Yes she did, then she became a tenant of the Housing Department. So now they want me to hand in my tenancy to have the top two floors. Like we live on this floor and we have a little bedroom upstairs, I don't really want the other two rooms. We are not going to run a business, maybe they think we are going to run a business, which we are not because we have a little retail shop in The Rocks, in the Clock Tower. I've got pressure from my wife to hand in my tenancy. Now I've never asked for a rebate, I've always said I am

willing to pay more rent because I am in that position and I believe if you pay more rent that is more money they have and the more good they can do building houses out in the suburbs for people who are justified, not spending four hundred dollars on a tourist house where you can't justify it. So if I sign this lease I have three years here and then after that I'm sure they won't renew it, or the rent would be that high.

27:25 Now when we tried to take over Shirley's museum Shirley wanted a hundred and ten thousand for the contents but we knew it wasn't worth that, since then we know it is worth about forty thousand dollars so I would have given my cousins a gift of seventy thousand dollars. Now we were going to run the museum, live in the top two floors and run the Ghost Tours from there. Now to have a museum you don't make money, you are there seven days a week and most museums have grants, or volunteers. We decided not to, the best thing we ever did, because a hundred and ten thousand is seventy thousand too much. The Housing Department wanted seven hundred and fifty dollars a week rent and in three years time they would have put it up to market value. Market value is like a piece of string, you don't know how long it is, and then we would also be pushed out after spending a lot of money. Plus the house is dark, noisy, and the worst thing about it, it has got bad vibes. Shirley's place, the museum, it has got bad vibes and that is the worst thing.

*Is that the museum next to the Garrison Church?*

28:36 No, it is the museum up here, 63 Lower Fort Street, it has got bad vibes so we didn't take it. I'm in that position now I don't know what to do. Now I could say no and I will always be a tenant of the Housing Department, I am willing to pay more rent. Other people, and good luck to them, many, many people live in four-storey houses by themselves because their family have moved on, passed away. It is hard moving people and you can't just say because you've got a job you shouldn't be in the Housing Department because people can lose their job again, you can't just put them in and pull them out, let them pay more money. If people have passed away you can't say because you live in a four-storey house they need to put families in there, they are going to move you to a smaller place. A lot of people have four storeys, when they buy back the landladies' leases they do deals. They pay the money and say in the end you can do this, we'll put you up in Sirius, or you'll do that. That's fine but I don't know, probably because I'm outspoken I seem to be attracting conflict but I don't know, I've only got three years here and then I'm gone.

29:59 END OF TAPE MP-FH4 SIDE A

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30:01 START OF TAPE MP-FH4 SIDE B

*I get the feeling talking to people that the Department of Housing have some sort of ulterior motive, do you get that feeling at all, they have a plan or something like that, would you agree or not?*

30:25 Oh I think they must have a plan because they really can't afford to repair these houses, there are so many houses here that need a lot of repairs. It is neglect by the government, they can't blame the Department of Housing, it has been neglected over the last thirty odd years. They have finally repaired the roofs, painted them, the down pipes, but in a lot of cases they haven't repaired the inside because of water damage. All the people they put in, who are justified but who have got social problems or needs do not have the same passion or care. The older people who live in Millers Point, they paint their own place, they care for it and they are beautiful. They do have a motive that they really can't afford to maintain these places for the income. They could get more money for them if they wanted to. They are putting a lot of places up for a ninety-nine year lease.

31:26 The group of shops, now we could have had the best village of all Sydney in Millers Point, those beautiful little shops up there, but the Department of Housing put them out for tender, someone got them reasonably cheap, other people, I believe, got a few of them and put on a bit of paint and sold them for a lot of money. Now, they didn't apply to Heritage about the usage, the usage should have been a shop. So all these shop fronts around here, they could have been a hairdresser, a little corner shop, a cafe, now people have got them now and they live in them, now that is not what a village is all about. This is Australia's first village, this is where it happened, and they have destroyed that village around there. We had to fight so many times to keep the post office there, it looked like the post office was going to go. It is a constant battle with large developers, politicians and government because we are in a little unique place, The Rocks, and the development around it is like a noose and it gets tighter and tighter.

32:33 That is why you need someone strong for the RAG, you need a voice, you need a voice, you need people to stand up. Not be stirrers, if you are stirrers and you complain about everything you don't get any respect, so it is very important. I believe there is hidden agendas, I am sure there would be.

32:53 I had a knock on the door ..... and his card is there, where he wrote on the back of the card 'Joe Tripodi, the new Housing Department Minister'. It was five o'clock at night and the front door bell rang and I looked out the window, I had just had a shower, and he said, 'I believe you have got a vacant room, a couple of vacant rooms here in some houses up the road.' I had a look at him and I said, 'You wouldn't be Joe Tripodi of the Housing Department?' and he said, Yes. He said 'Get dressed and come down,' so I said okay, I would do anything for anyone, even him. So I explained to him, I explained about Shirley, about buying back her premises there and other things. Number 19, the amount of money they wasted on the inside. Then we went up to number 21, which is vacant, a four-storey house, and we went to number 27, it is vacant. Then we went to number 31, which is vacant. Went to number 33, it is vacant. These are four-storey houses, just doors from me.

34:00 We talked about that, talked about how they repair the outside, but in some cases they can't afford to repair the inside. A lot of them they are putting up for ninety-nine year leases and then people are winning the tender for the highest bid and then they have to spend 'x' amount of money to restore that. That is a good idea because some of the buildings need a lot of work. As long as they restore all the heritage and keep the heritage. It is like Bligh House, which is Clydebank now, the best house in all of The Rocks, Uncle Peter bought that lease for a small amount and he lived there for many years and heard they were going to pull The Rocks down. He didn't tell his sisters, Shirley, my mother, or his mother and sold the lease for a small amount and left it full of cedar furniture and went down to Sutherland. After that doctors had it, then Mrs Simpson, who was part of Fairfax, she got a ninety-nine year lease. Her and Shirley used to clash, two strong women. Then she died and then very, very quietly Paul Cave, who started Bridge Climb and owns a little unit on the wharf down here for about five and a half million dollars, bought Bligh House. 35:19

Somehow they turned it from a ninety-nine year lease into a freehold, I don't know how they can put things out for ninety-nine year lease and all of a sudden they turn it into freehold. Now the gentleman, good luck to him, and his wife who have got the little cottage where people were killed with the leg of the table across from the Hero of Waterloo Hotel, that was a ninety-nine year lease. A young guy was given that to restore the house and he sold it, probably about six or seven years ago. Now that was a ninety-nine year lease so when he sold it, it might have had ninety years left on it, that has also been changed over to freehold.

*Why do you think this is happening?*

36:00 I don't know why if someone has already paid for it, if you have got a ninety-nine year and you get back in ninety-nine years - why would you be so generous and give it freehold. It won't be in our time but the government will finish up getting it back. I don't know. I don't know a lot of things they do. Like Shirley's place, they gave her two hundred thousand dollars, which is fifty thousand dollars a year for the next four years, but then they are only getting forty thousand dollars a year rent, so they have lost ten thousand dollars and they have to maintain it where she maintained it.

*Do you think the Department of Housing is trying to do all these things because they know the residents can't afford the upkeep of the houses and they are forced to hand back their tenancies because it is going to be too expensive to do?*

36:52 No, that is not the case because if you are a tenant of the Department of Housing they will put in carpet and paint it, especially if you are a bad tenant. You can break doors, break windows and they will just come and repair them. If you are a good tenant and you've got a water leak, or something like that, or you need something done it is very difficult to get them to do it. Older people like doing it themselves as well, they don't want to put the burden on the department. That is not the reason. The reason is they are all dying out and that's what Joe Tripodi said, he said, 'You are all dying out,' and I said, 'Yes, and you probably can't wait to get your hands on it.' He said, 'Those four places up the road could be offices,' and I said, 'Not likely, Joe.' I said, 'They could be a 5A lease,' and he said, 'What's a 5A lease?' I said, 'Well, in number 17, two doors from me, if anyone should be running a boarding house - it has been in my family for a hundred and six years I know how to run a boarding house on the top of my head and do it well. Here I am, a tenant in this house, I could be running a boarding house, giving more money back to the Department of Housing, but I'm not. Two doors away you gave a guy a 5A lease,' which means he didn't buy the lease, they just gave him a lease every six months and he has had it for like twelve or fourteen years and he pays the Department of Housing rent and then he can rent out all the rest of the building.

38:24 That is like the landladies, what Shirley fought the government for, and they won it but they got so many different standards. In this row of terrace houses they have got number 1 leased, someone has got a lease on it. Number 3 is a boarding house. Number 5, Sally next door has got the lease on that. Number 7, her son has got that. Number 9, Sally has got that. Lovely lady, she is in her eighties, I love her dearly, but if she could divide this room into four and put four tenants in there she would. Here, number 11, boarding house. Number 13, Julie has the lease on that. Number 15 is Shirley's, they bought that back and



they are getting a hundred and sixty dollars a floor. Number 17, a 5A lease. Number 19, the end of the terrace houses, destroyed the heritage inside, the whole lot, it will never happen again and they got forty or fifty dollars a floor and they spent over four hundred thousand dollars on the building. If you take this row of terrace houses for an example of the confusion, or lack of vision, or lack of foresight it is very confusing. If this is happening all over the state, well, we are wasting a lot of money. I'm not bitter, I'm just telling you the way it is because facts and facts and it is just the way it is. I will probably get this tape and destroy it.

*You won't get your hands on this. I will send you a copy of the tape.*

Send it before you give it to them, will you? I am sorry but that is just the way it is and that is the way it should be said.

*Brian what about the physical changes to the locality during your lifetime, for instance, the finger wharves and the changes to some of the houses, what has happened there?*

40:20 Well, the finger wharves were a working-class port and that is very special to everyone I think, even the people who still live in the high-rise and look down on it, who have got plenty of money. To watch a working port is much better than having high rise all the way along. You know the plan they have got for around the end of Millers Point there, from Darling Harbour, a lot of people aren't happy about that. Fifty per cent are going to be parkland but to accommodate the rest of them there will have to be high-rise. The ports are just beautiful old finger wharves, I have to say that Mirvac-Transfield, and I was on the committee, I have been on a lot of committees around here, have done a fantastic job of all of Walsh Bay.

41:14 Now around the paddock, near Ferry Lane, that used to be a paddock where people used to walk their dogs, give you one example of how the locals work in with large developers and that is mainly Aunt Shirley. We used to take our dogs for a walk in the paddock, which was lantana and messy, but it was our paddock. When the developers came along they wanted to put townhouses along there, now they would have gone right along to the end up to Windmill Street and be worth three million dollars each. We suggested that they put a park there, at the end of Ferry Lane, but you can't ask developers to do things for nothing, there is a trade-off. So the Bond Store in Windmill Street there on the corner, the Padbury I think it is called, we gave our support for them to go up one-storey higher. Now they went up one-storey higher and they probably made more money out of that and we got them to cut back two townhouses, so now we have a park. So there is

trade-off, if you just knock back development you don't get anything done. Now if you were on Observatory Hill, looking down, you would say that we did the wrong thing but standing in Ferry Lane in the park you would say that we did the right thing, so that is how things work.

42:31 Now other things with the houses, I think the Department of Housing are painting them now on the outside. They've got new policies, they are a bit stricter on their tenants, they are only putting them on a short lease until they can prove they are good tenants, I think all that is a plus. They are getting more money back so they can channel more money back into the Department of Housing. I have always fought for anyone whom I can help, I still do, I walk up the street and people stop me. If I go for a loaf of bread I can be gone an hour, with people asking me things and my helping them. If I can't now because of what I do, I suggest things and I guide them and they should be able to do it themselves. When I came in the door here before you came Les downstairs asked me something, the guy came over and gave me that parcel I just brought in from Pat up the road. She thinks she is dying and she wants to give me all the things from the past. That is what living in Millers Point is about, it is a village, it is helping people, it is supporting them. Doesn't matter if they killed a guy with an axe, he is still a person and he is a nice guy, that is the past. The way he is now he has trouble getting up the stairs so I don't think he would be killing too many people, I just worry about his carers down there. The houses around here - they need to do something to them.

44:04 There was talk about a policy they brought out, which was a very good policy but they have changed that, is that some of the houses, like they are empty, they should be given to the middle-of-the-road people who can afford the middle rents. Bit like the policemen, the firemen, the service people who live in the heart of the city, then you get a good blend. A while ago they brought in too many people with social problems, a lot of people with social problems, we have to have our quota but there should be a balance. I can't say they are not selective, because they can't do that but they are more aware of the balance in here. I believe one day the people they bring in, no discredit to them, is like coat hangers on the back, they will pick them all up one day and put them somewhere else, they won't complain and they won't fight because they are not locals, they are 'blow-ins' and they haven't got the passion. This is when they'll probably get all the houses back, sell them off, they'll make a lot of money for a short while, waste that, and then they are gone and that will be the end of the character of Millers Point.

45:19 Can I just tell you one thing about the houses. You should never do what I did in 1965, I am glad they will never allow that. There is a shop down in Windmill Street, number 67 Windmill Street, I bought the lease for that in 1965 for fifteen hundred pounds, not the lease, I'm sorry, the key to the door - there was nearly no paper work, for fifteen hundred pounds. Lived there with my ex-wife and three sons. Now I sandblasted the front of that shop, I was on a ladder and I had a little mask, no scaffolding in those days, and a guy holding a hose on the roof. I also sandblasted most of the cars in the street for no charge as well. I sandblasted the front of the shop and if you looked at it now you can see I didn't do a very good job, but it is beaten copper around the window. I ran a sandwich shop from there, my wife ran a sandwich shop, I did two other jobs as well because I had three kids. Upstairs above the shop is a lovely room but the room behind that is a dining room and a small kitchen behind that and it was fairly dark. Somehow I found this little builder, I don't know where, a little guy from England, just got off the boat I think, cap and a pipe and we knocked all the plaster off the walls in 67 Windmill Street, took it back to the convict stone with the shell around the stone because in the old days they didn't have lime and they used to go around picking up the shells from the foreshores, crush it and burn it.

46:54 You can still see a lot of buildings with the shells around that convict stone and each convict stone has a different marking because the stonemason, when he picked at it, he had his own marking, so you knew what stone was carved by each stonemason. So we knocked all the plaster out and it was dark in the next room so I said, 'All right, go ahead knock out the wall,' so he took out the convict stone and put this lovely big archway, rough archway, going from the lounge room into the dining room. Now if you did that nowadays, sandblasted a heritage building, knocked out a convict wall and put a large archway in they would string me up by my ears, but I'd have to say it hasn't done anything to the building, it hasn't weakened the structure of the building.

47:40 Now that building is up for tender for a ninety-nine year lease - I believe it has been passed in for over eight hundred thousand dollars, they want more for it, now if I hadn't of sandblasted the front of the shop, put in the big archway, knocked all the plaster off, you probably would have it up for a couple of hundred thousand less, so I have added two hundred thousand dollars to it. But the people who win the tender have to spend over two hundred thousand dollars on it. I didn't know it had a verandah that came out from the front of it, and I've seen photographs of a verandah, they have to restore it. I believe it used to be an inn called the 'Hit and Miss' and the building next to it was another inn called the

'Live and Let Live' and the one next to the Hero Hotel was the 'Shipwright Arms', so round there we had a lot of inns, and that is another story, the inns. I would suggest if you are listening to this tape please do not go and destroy heritage buildings.

*We'll take your message there. Talking about the economic activities of Millers Point...*

Sorry, I sold that building, I had it for three years and sold the key to the door for five thousand pounds and that is when I left to go to Taree, after destroying the building.

*You made a profit. The economic activities of the wharves and the shipping and all the things that went on in Millers Point in the past - how important do you think that was to the city of Sydney?*

49:15 Oh, it was very important because people relied on the shipping and the shipping was so important, with the goods coming in. The strikes crippled Sydney, like we had many, many strikes. My father, my grandfather and my two uncles all worked on the waterfront and that was difficult - if it wasn't for the boarding houses that kept them going. Many men used to work with my father, where they used to employ the waterside workers after the Hungry Mile, that is where they used to walk up to the Union Room, beside the big house which is the Morton's Hotel now, to pick up rations. Also too, if you were a wharfie and you wanted to become a Panno, which is like a supervisor, you would go to a certain hotel and you would go and there were a group of Pannos in there, you would bet something like five hundred pounds that you wouldn't be a Panno. They'd take your name and address and they'd tell you come back next week, so you'd go back the next week and they would throw your card on the table with your name and address and that you were now a Panno, so you lost that bet and you gave them five hundred pounds. But they would steal anything, my God, what people used to steal at that wharf down there. There was a gang and they were on for a week on this big job and they stole a car in pieces.

*What, slowly took it apart?*

50:50 Harry, my uncle, used to walk out the gate holding a lunch bag, but in the lunch bag were the things he stole, or stuffed in between the fork of his trousers. You walked up to the lottery office when it was near the State Theatre in Market Street, where was the only place you could buy tickets, he walked up there and took the doormat under his arm and walked off.

*Brian, when you look at the community as a whole, what do you think is their sense of attachment to the place, their shared values, their resilience and their look at heritage?*

51:27 Because we are working-class people, we were always working-class, on the wharves, coal lumpers, ferries and boats, that is what made us so special. I still look at the old people, I still look at them, with love and compassion. I am a 'blow-in' compared to

some of them, I'm a third generation. My son still lives here and my grandson, so we go back five generations, not including my great-great-great-great grandmother, who stole seven handkerchiefs and got ten years and came out on the Second Fleet and she was a nurse in The Rocks, I don't even count her but she lived in The Rocks then. The feeling of community, like the RAG meeting, like the Junior Tennis which I helped start. I am the chairman of Argyle House which is for three men, pensioners, up the road. The RAG meeting, the CCC, the Community Consultative, we started the first Department of Housing meeting for tenants here.

52:36 Also in the old days - we used to have the rabbit man come around The Rocks, it is hard to believe that even at fifty-eight, nearly fifty-nine, we had the ice-man come here as well. With the TV licence they used to come and inspect and were allowed into your house. Once they found out about it people would run next door and knock on your door and say they're coming and we'd lock in. Waltons used to come here and people used to tick things up and pay it on the never-never. We still have that but we are losing that because the older people now have got so old and frail and they are staying at home, which is sad. A lot of people because of break-ins too, because of drugs, they are scared to leave and if they do someone breaks in and they are scared to go home, that is quite sad.

53:30 Now the Housing Department are putting families back in here but if you haven't got the community set up for them, like when I was young I played in the park under the Bridge, I went to King George V Playground. They had a good service up there, I learnt how to hit a ball with a wooden bat against the wall, that is why I love tennis. It hasn't got the back-up here for kids, it is not the place to raise a family. Now because of these houses becoming spare, like I said, four or five or more, a lot more empty houses - if they don't have the structure for that and the back-up they'll be hanging around corners, violence will happen.

54:09 They could turn it, I hope not, into a type of ghetto, we replace one ghetto by closing down Redfern or somewhere and we can create another one. Maybe there is a reason for it, that happens in some places in the world where they put in certain families in a house, in a high-rise, very expensive, prices go down, take them out, and then they buy up houses, I don't know. If they don't have that proper thing, a structure, for young kids, the back-up, I don't think they have really put a great deal of thought into it, it is not the place to raise a family.

I have a grandson here and he is eight, and they've just had another one and he is only six

months old, I wouldn't like to see him stay in Millers Point. No, I don't think it is good for him.

*Could you live anywhere else though, Brian?*

55:06 That's a good one. I just love passionately the people of Millers Point, I love where I live because I've been here since 1946. I love the view, I put up with the noise, I don't expect to get a car park out the front. I am a very flexible guy, a lot of people might think I'm not, I'm strong-willed. I would love to stay here forever but I think I might have to sign that lease for three years and after that I haven't got the ties any more, I'm gone because I can't expect my wife to live in a place with a shared bathroom and hallways. It is a bit like playing poker - you are in or you are out and I think that is what they are doing trying to bluff me, and if it wasn't for her my God they would never bluff me.

55:56 Would I ever leave? If I had the money, which I haven't got because I've never made a great deal - it might sound like I have but you can make money and be unemployed for two years afterwards.

Before I set up the present thing I'm doing now, the Ghost Tours of The Rocks, I did that because of all the stories passed down from family-to-family, local-to-local, it has taken off, we do it well. It can't be a high profile at the moment, which might not be the same next week, businessman in The Rocks and live in a Department of Housing, I expect to pay a bit more rent but I'd like it a bit longer than three years.

56:37 To end this I am going to make a statement, my wife doesn't know about it, but I am writing back to the Department of Housing and saying I accept the rent but for three years - to hand in a tenancy there has to be give and take on both sides and I think they are trying to get it all on one side, I'm requesting a longer tenancy and then I will hand in my tenancy and be like everyone else out there. If I get pushed out of Millers Point, Dawes Point, so be it I will get out there and survive but it will give me more time to build up the business I am doing now. There are other people who are more qualified to be in public housing than me.

*Well Brian, that is a note to finish the interview on, perhaps not a very happy one, or one we don't know the outcome of. Thank you very much Brian for this interview.*

57:40 END OF INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN HARRISON AND END OF TAPE MP-FH4  
SIDE B

