

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
REDFERN, WATERLOO AND ALEXANDRIA

Name: Ted McDermott

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Place: ?

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR: Interview with Mr Ted McDermott, 5 October 1994.**

Mr McDermott, where were you born?

TM: I was born at 180 Castlereagh Street Redfern. Now, it's not Castlereagh Street today, it's Chalmers Street but it's quite close, almost on top of the South Sydney Leagues Club where that is now. Towards Phillip Street on the same side, the house is still there. They're two-storied houses, there's a terrace of them and they are still there. But then the South Sydney Leagues Club, a lot of the places

further on towards Redfern Street they've all disappeared but this terrace of houses is still there but it used to be called Castlereagh Street, now it's called Chalmers Street.

SR: And what year was that?

TM: That was in 1925.

SR: And did you grow up in Redfern?

TM: Most of my life I did, my young life, yes, I did.

SR: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

TM: I had one brother and two sisters but they were not all born, only my eldest sister was born in Redfern. My two youngest, my brother and sister, were born when we shifted out of Redfern.

SR: When did you shift out of Redfern?

TM: That's a good question. Actually, I think one of them was born in Redfern. We shifted out when I was about fourteen, thirteen, fourteen.

SR: And where did you go then?

TM: Well, the house in Castlereagh Street, we went to a little house on the corner of Union Street and Phillip Street Redfern and from there we went across to Walker Street Redfern. From Walker Street Redfern we went to Rosebery.

SR: What kind of a kid were you?

TM: Not a bad kid, I don't suppose.

2.06 **SR: What kind of kid were you?**

TM: I think I was just a normal type of kid 'round Redfern, possibly vamped it a little bit more than most of the kids in Redfern. Mum was pretty fussy with us kids and being the only boy at the time I was probably spoiled a little bit.

SR: And what was the usual sort of kid in Redfern?

TM: About the same as myself, only some of them were all larrikins, including myself at times.

SR: What are your earliest memories?

TM: My earliest memories. I don't recall much of the time that we spent in Castlereagh Street but I do recall some of the time we spent in the

house in Union Street, on the corner of Union Street and Phillip Street. I went to George Street School which was just down the road. I wasn't a bad kid at school. I wasn't a brilliant student but I got along all right, you know. And some of my earliest memories are of my schooldays at George Street School.

SR: And what was that like?

TM: It was O.K. except for one teacher. He was rather an oddbod. I won't name him but he used to have a habit of walking through the classroom and grabbing a handful of hair and standing you up in front of the class and, of course, that's vastly different in those days to what it is these days. And it got to the point there with this teacher that one of the kids – there was a lad there named Les Humphries and I don't mind mentioning his name but this teacher got that way this day and grabbed him by the hair and shook him and shook him by the head. He broke free and dived straight out the window onto the balcony and then jumped over the rail of the balcony and took off from school and the teacher took off after him. And while he was out of the classroom - he used to have six canes to give you six of the best. You know, you used to hold your hand out and they'd go whack, whack, whack with the cane and there were a few holes in the floor – so the kids, while he was out chasing Les Humphries they grabbed his canes and stuck them all down the hole in the floor and got rid of his canes that way.

4.17

Well, that was a bit of a wild day there because he wasn't too happy when he come back. But I've got pretty fond memories of George Street School and, of course, at a later date I went to Bourke Street School and I went to Cleveland Street School and I've got pretty good memories of both of them.

SR: What makes them good, what are some of those memories?

TM: I think it was mainly the kids that were there with us and we were learning the three Rs. Nothing like today. We didn't have computers, we didn't have calculators and things like that and I think the teachers were far more dedicated than what they are today.

SR: O.K, I'll ask a few questions about your family and just sort of the life that you had there. What sort of family do you come from?

TM: I'm not sure that I understand.

SR: Well, what did your father do for a living?

TM: Well, in the early days I'm not too sure what dad when I was a young child, a real young child but I know, which I didn't know until a later date

when I got a few years into my life, that both my father and my mother originally worked at a factory, Holbrooks, and Holbrooks were sauce people and jams, etcetera, and so forth like that and I think from memory they were over in Bourke Street in Waterloo. Then at a later date my father worked – there was a hotelier down in Sydney that had a hotel in Sydney and he owned the bar concessions at the Royal Easter Show – and my dad worked at the Royal Easter Show when it was on.

6.16 He also helped as a barman in the hotel in Sydney as a part time job as well as whatever his daytime job was at the time. My mother worked at the jam factory, I don't know for how long and I don't even recall when she left there.

SR: She was working most of your childhood?

TM: A fair bit of it, yes, yes, a fair bit of it.

SR: What sort of a man was your father?

TM: My father was a pretty good sort of a fella but he was a tough dad, fairly strict, and I don't think it was because he wasn't a good father or anything like that. I think it was the pressures of living that made it difficult for him because if you recall, around about the time I'm talking about was 'round about the Depression time. And certainly we never went short of food but as I remarked to you before this interview, I can recall on many an occasion things were pretty grim and we had bread and dripping and salt; that was our diet for the day or maybe a couple of days. We had a pretty good life. We didn't seem to notice it because nobody was any different to us, we were all the same; everybody was in the same boat at that time.

SR: Were your parents able to keep in work in the Depression?

TM: I was pretty young, as I say, at that particular time. I was only around six or seven years of age and I'm not too sure but I don't think dad worked right through the Depression. No, I couldn't say for sure; I was a bit too young.

SR: But did your mum work through the Depression?

TM: Part of it, I think, yes, yes.

8.03 **SR: And what sort of a woman was your mother?**

TM: My mother was a fantastic woman. Her two kids at the time come first, second and third.

SR: Well, when you say that your father was tough and times were tough, how was that? I mean “tough” today and “tough” then are different things. Can you describe what behaviour he had?

TM: Well, he didn't mince words. If he told you not to do anything and you did it you were in big trouble and probably got a smack across the backside or a clip over the ear. When he spoke it was law, that was it; whether it was me, my sister, my mother or anyone else that was it; he didn't speak twice.

SR: He was head of the house?

TM: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. That's in the early days.

SR: And what happened later?

TM: Well, when we got up to the stage where I'd grown into an adult, my mother had grown into a bit of an adult too and she was the boss, at a later date, much later date. But dad was a good man; as well as tough, he was a good man. Not always fair but he tried to be. As I say, before I said it, I think it was the pressures of the time and the worries that he had to try and make ends meet.

SR: And with your mother you say she put the kids first.

TM: Second and third.

SR: And was she very warm?

TM: My mother was a loving person, she was beautiful. She used to cuddle us up and look after us and nurse us and if dad went crook she'd have a go back at dad and then she'd grab us and take us away and try to keep us safe. Not that he injured us badly or anything but she tried to protect us from all that.

SR: Were your parents religious?

10.03 TM: Strangely enough my mother was Church of England, my dad was a Catholic and I didn't know that till I was about thirty years of age. No, they weren't religious.

SR: Were they politically involved, do you know?

TM: Not till the latter years. In the later years mum wasn't politically involved at all but in the later years my dad was involved not to any great extent – and I talk about “latter years” when dad had established himself in business – and I think his support for his political views were more financial than anything else.

SR: Was that in the '40s you're talking about then?

TM: Yes, a little after the '40s, a little after the '40s.

SR: What business did he get into?

TM: My dad was a scrap metal merchant. He worked for himself and he made quite a good fist of it and at the same time he was a registered bookmaker on the course. And I might add before he was a registered bookmaker in the rough old days he was an SP bookmaker up in Walker Street Waterloo but then he progressed onto being a registered, licensed bookmaker on course and he worked mainly at trots and dogs meetings. And when my dad passed on I continued on in that train and when I retired my eldest boy continued on. He's since retired because of the failings at the racecourses, people not going there any more, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera; it's not viable any more for bookmakers. But my dad was in the scrap metal business, that was his main business, and the bookmaking was a weekend and night-time affair.

SR: Have a lot of people coming to the house?

TM: Not a lot of people, only relatives.

SR: Where did he do his bookmaking?

TM: He did it at Wentworth Park and Harold Park, Harold Park Trots, Harold Park Dogs, Wentworth Park Dogs, but originally, early in the piece, my dad travelled all over the state, Dapto, Bulli, Newcastle, everywhere; my dad worked approximately five or six nights a week as a bookmaker.

12.10 **SR: Well, what about when he was SP-ing?**

TM: when he was SP bookmaking he was up in Walker Street Waterloo.

SR: That was at your house?

TM: No, it was my grandmother's house.

SR: So he didn't do it at home?

TM: No. And I might add that in the scrap metal and in those days it was quite a common thing to have a lot of two-up games around. He also run a two-up game for quite some time.

SR: Where did he do that?

TM: He had a business that you entered via a laneway to go into his business place. It's off Elizabeth Street Redfern and you had to go through - the big double gates opened up to let you into the place.

SR: That's the scrap metal place?

TM: That's the scrap metal yard, yes. And you used to have to wind your way through all the garbage and metal or whatever it was and they had a little door cut in the side and you used to go through that into the backyard of a house that was actually in Kettle Street Redfern and that's where they used to play their two-up and, of course, they had cockatoos and all watching for the coppers and everything like that.

SR: And was that in the '30s, you think the late '30s?

TM: No, no, no, that was later. I don't know how long it had been going but I became aware of that possibly in the early '40s.

SR: You'd have been fifteen, sixteen, seventeen?

TM: Around about, yes.

SR: So he didn't start doing it until the '40s?

TM: I say I wasn't aware of it till then but it's possible he could have been in that, I don't know.

SR: So you were kept away from it?

TM: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

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

13.56 TM: Well, dad ruled with a pretty heavy hand until the latter years and then mum took over the discipline and there wasn't much discipline needed. There was only me and my eldest sister and myself up to my brother who's ten years younger than I am. And then when he came along and my younger sister – she's fifteen years younger than I am – they were treated differently by my father than what my eldest sister and I were because I think that like all of us when we get married and have a family we learn by our mistakes and they had quite a happy childhood and so did we, so did we, only they didn't get the discipline that we got.

SR: Were you expected as a kid to contribute toward the family? Like I've heard tales of people going around factories and scavenging things and wood and selling it.

TM: You mean financially?

SR: Yes, financially or getting food and all different sorts of things. As a child were you involved in anything like that?

TM: Never, never. As I say, my dad always provided for us. As tough as he was he always provided and sometimes it had to be bread and dripping and a little bit of salt sprinkled on it or something like that but it was always there; we never went without something.

SR: And were you renting in Redfern?

TM: We were living with my grandparents in Castlereagh Street where I was born. When we went to Union Street and Phillip Street, yes, we were renting there. We were renting in Walker Street until my father bought a house in Rosebery many years later.

SR: And you were never evicted during the Depression?

TM: Never.

SR: Can you remember any of the eviction battles of the 1930s where people resisted?

TM: No, I can't. The only resistance and battles that I can remember after the pubs closed at six o'clock on a Saturday night.

SR: Tell us about that. They were quite notorious.

15.59 TM: Well, on the corner of Kettle Street and Elizabeth Street Redfern there was a hotel called the Australian 11. On the opposite corner of Kettle Street and Elizabeth Street was a billiard room. Now, I don't know if you've experienced the type of billiard room that I'm speaking of but there was a billiard room and there was possibly six or eight big billiard tables in there and people used to gather there but the pub used to be open and close at six o'clock. Now, the battles that I've experienced in Redfern are nothing like the battles and the things you read about today. In those days it was a fair go for everybody. I only thought about it this morning. It's quite interesting and possibly you may never have heard of it, certainly your daughter wouldn't have heard of it and most certainly a lot of young people today wouldn't have heard of it but 'round about five o'clock maybe they were getting a bit tiddly from ten o'clock in the morning. Around about five o'clock somebody'd get the bright idea he'd down his drink and he'd tip his glass upside down and sit it on the counter and if you did that you were declaring that you were the best man in the pub and "I'll take anyone on". And never, ever did I see that happen that somebody didn't say "Right, I'm going to show you you're not the best man in the pub" and out they'd go. Now, they'd either walk across the road to Redfern Park or out into Kettle Street. Everybody'd take their grog and they'd walk out with their schooners or middies or whatever they had and they'd form a circle 'round them and they'd toe the line and into it, bareknuckle and go. And the difference

between then and today is that if I was having a fight with a guy, I was one of the participants – not that I ever did but if I was – and he whacked and he was too good for me and if I says “I've had enough”, if I went down and says “I've had enough” he'd walk over and grab you and help you up and shake hands, into the pub and have a drink together.

18.01

And by the same token if two men were fighting and one was getting the better of the other and any one out of the crowd stepped in – in other words if it was two against one or three against one or like the cowards of today, six and seven against one – that would never be allowed; they'd get a terrible hiding off the crowd. It was one against one, a fair go. And some Saturdays there were different guys from the area that would turn around and tip their glass up every Saturday afternoon and maybe the same bloke that did it last Saturday would turn around and say “Well, I told you last week you wasn't the best. Get outside” and away they'd go again, you see, and this happened quite often. Up on the corner – I discussed it with you earlier on - on the corner of Redfern Street and Walker Street was the Albert View and it was quite commonly called the Bloodhouse at times and there were terrific fights up there and right opposite was a Greek church and it didn't seem to matter. There might be five or six fights going at the one time, you know, a couple in Redfern Street and three or four down Walker Street and one in the pub but they used to have their offsidars but everyone'd go out to make sure it was a fair go. As I said before, there was never any of this cowardly stuff like three and four onto one or they never, ever picked and knocked down an old woman like some of the cowards today do. That was never on; it was always a fair go. And the publican'd turn around and say “Right, hang on. Blue on. All out”, out they'd go out the pub and into it, you see. But as soon as one bloke had had enough the crowd'd say “Righto, fair go. He's had enough”, they'd shake hands, walk inside and have a beer together.

SR: And why was the place called the Bloodhouse – what made it worse than the others?

TM: Well, I don't know that it was any worse than the others. I mean, I suppose at some time or another during some time of their life the hotels, any one of them could have been called the Bloodhouse because with six o'clock closing on a Saturday afternoon it just seemed to be the general thing to do. There wasn't much else to do in those days.

20.12

SR: And did all the kids and the women of the neighbourhood – this is all happening out in the street so - - -

TM: Yes, they'd go out and have a look, yes, they'd go out and have a look but they wouldn't interfere; nobody interfered.

SR: So what I'm getting at is you were a child.

TM: Yes.

SR: We're talking about late '20s and '30s.

TM: Yes.

SR: So you wouldn't have been in the pub because you were underage so you witnessed this?

TM: Yes. Yes, I used to witness it, yes.

SR: And it wasn't frowned upon that the kids were standing around, watching this? This was just part of life?

TM: No, because everything was done fairly. I mean the kids couldn't learn anything bad about it other than, you know, be able to handle yourself, look after yourself. You live in Redfern, you've got to be able to look after yourself but it was all done fairly. The kids, nobody was worried. I mean they didn't have to stand there and watch a team kicking a man or something like that or bashing him with a baseball bat or anything like that. It was a fair go; it was just a knuckle fight and that was it. And when it was over, don't forget, the kids also saw them shake hands, arm around each other and back into the pub for a drink.

SR: It sounds like times were pretty tough. What did your family do for fun? Was there time out, was there time for fun as a family?

TM: Yes. Well, outside of my own family my mother had a big family. She had five sisters, I think, and two brothers, three brothers, or something like that – I just forget now – and they had families and we used to all make our fun. I was only thinking the other day when I was a kid the footpaths they used to have sandstock gutters, right, and because of people walking on them they used to wear out hollow and if there's a little bit of an incline or something we used to race marbles down there for hours and hours and hours.

22.07

I'd have a green one and somebody else'd have a red one and someone else have a blue and they used to run down in the gutter and we used to spend hours doing that sort of thing. There was many, many things.

SR: Do you recall any time going out with your parents, your dad and your mum?

TM: Many, many times, yes. My dad, he had motorcars and we used to go out. Prior to that I'd like to tell you one thing about it. Over in Walker Street Redfern there was a family named Woods and there was Nellie Woods and Pearlie Woods with the two daughters and Nellie Woods – I'm trying to think of it – she had that problem that children get, I can't think of it – but anyhow she was a huge girl – she was only young.

SR: Overactive thyroid?

TM: No, no, no, no. She was a little bit backward. I can't think of the word I'm looking for but however.

SR: O.K.

TM: She was a little retarded, not much, but she was a lovely girl and she couldn't work, she couldn't do anything and she was a huge girl, very short but very large and a very sick person. Her sister, Pearlie, was older than her and she used to go to work and, of course, she lived with her mum and dad there and they lived next door to us. And every morning you'd go and Nellie'd be out there, leaning on the gate and saying good morning to everybody as they went past - everybody loved Nellie Woods. And Nellie's father used to work – I've got an idea it was for – I'm not sure of the name but I think it might have been Bennett and Wood or one of those places, I can't recall – but he had a horse and a cart and it had the printing 'round the side and for the life of me I can't recall what it was but come Sunday about ten or fifteen, maybe twenty people, including us next door, we'd pile on the back of the cart and off we'd go for a picnic and he'd take us out to Carss Park.

24.15

It's just out past – you know where Carss Park is – out near Hurstville and there was a picnic ground there. And then in the afternoon about three o'clock he'd have to get us all back on and jog us back with the horse and cart and take us back to Redfern. We had many, many happy times; there were lots of things that you used to do; we used to make our own fun. I don't know, we had billycarts. We used to make them ourselves or our dad'd make them with a couple of bits of wood and old ball bearings and put them on and a bit of rope to steer it with and we used to race those down the hills and things like that. Our mum and dads used to join in with like playing tennis or something like that.

SR: Where would you play tennis?

TM: Redfern Park, Redfern Oval, right opposite South Leagues Club. On the corner of the park there used to be I'm pretty sure it was tennis courts. Failing that it was a bowling green but there was a clubhouse,

a weatherboard clubhouse there and I vaguely recall that there were tennis courts there. But in latter years when I come home from the war I joined the Redfern RSL and that's where the Redfern RSL started, in the old clubhouse on the corner of the Redfern Oval in Castlereagh Street and I vaguely recall it. I could be wrong but if it wasn't tennis courts there it was bowling greens but they went away and the RSL started there until they moved over to near Redfern Station with a bigger club.

SR: You showed me a photo earlier of the snake pit out at La Perouse.

TM: Yes.

SR: Was that something that you went to often?

25.59 TM: Well, yes, quite often we went out 'round there. And we used to go to Yarra Bay because I believe in their younger days my mum and dad that used to be a favourite spot of theirs, Yarra Bay, and not only mum and dad. But, you see, in their younger days they didn't have the transport to get around like we've got today and you used to go to Yarra Bay and La Perouse would be quite a distance to go and have a picnic or something like that and come home before dark and that sort of thing at Carss Park. You'd go down to Manly or somewhere like that; it was a big day.

SR: And did you mostly get there by car?

TM: Yes, yes. Quite a few times we went by tram.

SR: Did your father always have a car that you remember?

TM: If he didn't have a car he nearly always had a truck.

SR: So you must have been quite affluent through the Depression, really.

TM: No. He didn't have it in those days. He was working at the hotels and he was working at Holbrooks Sauce [factory]. I'm talking about afterwards, after that.

SR: So not during the Depression year or the '20s or early '30s? Later '30s?

TM: Mm.

SR: They were becoming more common then.

TM: My dad bought his first new motorcar in 1937 and it was a Chev [Chevrolet] and he was the only one in Walker Street Redfern that owned a car at that time.

SR: Did you ever go to the beach?

TM: Yes, yes. My grandmother, a little bit later on when I was probably twelve or fourteen, she used to live at Manly and we used to always go to Manly, get on the ferry and go over to Manly and spend the day on the beach or spend the weekend down there with my grandmother and the rest of the family. All the family used to go down, my mum's five sisters and two brothers, three brothers, whatever it is, and all their kids, we'd all go there. Nan and pop had a big home there with a big verandah 'round the outside because you didn't have to worry about locking your doors and things at those times. You could sleep on the open verandah and nobody'd touch you, nobody'd come near you. But those days were the good old days as far as I'm concerned.

28.04

A lot of people won't agree with me but I'd like to see them back again because there were so many things that went on in those days. And you talk about food and what did we eat and those sort of things. I mean it was quite a common occurrence to have a knock on the door and it'd be one of the kids from next door or across the road, "Mrs McDermott, mum says have you got a cup of sugar you could lend us?" and you'd give them a cup of sugar because the next day you might have to run across and get a cup of sugar off them or something, a couple of spoonfuls of butter or a glass of milk or something like that. It was quite a common thing for people because they'd run out and the shops'd be closed because we didn't have twenty four hour shopping and those sort of things in those days.

SR: You mentioned earlier, I think, that when you were born your parents were living with your mother's parents.

TM: Yes, yes.

SR: Your grandparents, even when they moved, was there a close association with your grandparents? Were people in and out of each other's houses?

TM: All the time. I was born on the 9th of December in 1925 and I'll give you an idea what it was like. My cousin Jeannie was born on the 12th of December 1925. I was born downstairs, she was born upstairs. Now, Jeannie's family consisted of about seven or eight kids. Like that was my brother's daughter and they eventually had seven or eight kids. They had a big family and we were always close. Now, my

grandmother and grandfather's house was the focal point of the family; that's where everyone went, the whole lot. Whenever you went there there could be fifty or sixty people there, including all the kids and aunties and uncles and cousins. So, yes.

SR: Did you say Jeannie was born in 1925? That's when you were born.

TM: Yes. She was born three days after me in the same house.

30.04 **SR: Right.**

TM: They lived there also. As you can realise, I was only born there. I wouldn't have lived there when I was born because I'd just come into the world but there might have been two or three of the other brothers and sisters married and living there too; it was quite a large house. They're still there, the houses, but it was quite a large house. But that was quite common in those days for big families to live in the one house.

SR: What can you remember of the evenings as a child? Say you're eight or ten years old, did you have your main meal in the evening?

TM: Yes.

SR: And what would that be, generally speaking?

TM: Well, on Friday night, every Friday night of my life for many, many years it was fish and chips.

SR: Were your family Catholic? Oh, one of them was.

TM: My dad was but not practising.

SR: Did most people have fish on Friday nights whether they were Catholic or not?

TM: I don't know about the fish with Catholics because it never entered into our house but I know that most people had fish [break in recording]

SR: In Phillip Street?

TM: In between Walker Street and Morehead Street in Phillip Street there was a little fish shop and I mean a little fish shop and on Friday night people'd be queued up down Phillip Street waiting to get into that fish shop. It seemed to be a favourite meal on Friday night, hot fish and chips, and I can recall that and year in and year out Friday night fish and chips.

SR: And what about other nights?

TM: Well, I don't recall, really, at that young stage but we always had something.

SR: Did your parents like their work?

TM: I don't know, I don't know. My father certainly liked his work, my dad liked his work. He was working for himself in latter days and he was a very good worker because he worked in the bars and the hotels for this Mr Luscombe [?] who had hotels and things in the city and he worked there as a barman and then when the [Sydney] Showground come on my dad used to be put in charge.

32.15

There might be ten, fifteen bars at the Royal Easter Show [held at Sydney Showground] and my dad was managing the lot of them. We wouldn't see my father for just on a month when the Royal Easter Show come on. He'd be out there preparing things and after it was over he'd be out there clearing it up because the Show went for about ten days, I think, but he was a week or ten days either side of that for the time that the Show took. And eventually he worked at the races for this Mr Luscombe because he had bars at the racecourses too and dad finished up manager of a lot of those bars. Yes, I'd say my dad liked his work and he was well respected by the people that did employ him at the time but he didn't stay employed by people for too long because he had the initiative to get into business himself, you know, and he made a very, very good fist of it.

SR: What about when he was at Holbrooks?

TM: Well, when he was at Holbrooks my mother was at Holbrooks too – I think that's where they met, actually. It's getting back a little bit further because they never worked at Holbrooks for long during my early days. I mean that was the end of their Holbrooks stance.

SR: So where did your mother work after she left Holbrooks?

TM: I think she worked at Sargents Meat Pies. They used to have little pie shops around the town and up in Redfern, down in Chippendale. Sargents Pies had different little pie shops. You used to go in and have pie and peas or pie and potato and a cup of tea or whatever and my mother was a waitress at some of Sargents.

34.04

SR: Was your mother happy at her work?

TM: Well, I suppose so, I don't know. She was certainly happy at her work as a mother.

SR: So when she came home - - -

TM: Mum didn't work for long after we were born. She might have worked for my sister, two and a half years older than me; she probably worked longer of her life than what she did of mine.

SR: Do you ever recall your parents being involved in industrial action?

TM: No, no, they didn't. Well, as I say, mum didn't work for long and my dad got away to a pretty early start in his own business in his life. He was still only a comparatively young man when he started to work for himself.

SR: Well, when your mother was at home from when she stopped work can you describe your mother's working day?

TM: My mother's working day was one of continual go, go, go, go, go, washing, ironing, house cleaning, she was a bit I don't know what you'd say but she was a woman that everything had to be spotless and everything had to be spot-on.

SR: What time would she start, do you know?

TM: Well, she used to start pretty early in the morning with me and my sister and then in later days with my brother and sister coming along my mum had a pretty early start and a pretty late finish.

SR: Did you have cooked breakfasts?

TM: No, I think we had Weetbix and things like that, or porridge. You know, that's the normal thing that everyone had in those days.

SR: And what would you have for lunch?

TM: At school and that? Sandwiches.

SR: And what about say on Saturday and Sunday or in the holidays?

TM: We used to have a baked dinner on Sunday.

SR: What would that be?

36.02 TM: About the same as what you have in a baked dinner today only probably better cooked and much better without all the additives they put in it these days sort of thing.

SR: So a leg of lamb or chicken?

TM: Yes, yes. Well, chicken at that time was a bit of a delicacy. It's not like it is today. It's quite common today - even my dog eats chicken today - but, no, rabbit was more the average person's fare in those days.

SR: Would that be a special meal, one of your baked dinners?

TM: A baked rabbit, that was quite common.

SR: That would be your Sunday meal, would it?

TM: Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

SR: That would be a weekday meal?

TM: Rabbit in those days was much more like chicken is today: everyone had it. That might be another interesting point for you. There used to be a guy come 'round with a horse and dray and his name was Clarrie Byrnes in later days. I don't know who the guys were in later days, I don't know who the guys were in the earlier days, and he used to sing out "Rabbits, rabbits" and he'd sell you a pair of rabbits off the back of the dray.

SR: Would they still have their fur on?

TM: No, no, no, no, they'd be all skinned and all ready to go, gutted and whatnot. Of course, there was lots of things like that. I mean there was a wood and coal man used to come 'round, selling wood and open fires and coal and coke.

SR: Did your mother cook on a fuel stove?

TM: Yes, we had fuel stoves. In Phillip Street and Union Street there was a fuel stove, yes. Of course, they were quite common in those days too.

SR: How did you heat your hot water?

TM: Well, there used to be what they called a copper. I don't know if this can be seen but they were probably a couple of feet across and a couple of feet deep. They're made of copper, it was like a big pot, and it was set in brickwork and underneath it you used to light a fire.

38.05

You'd fill that with buckets and you'd heat your water and when the water was heated you'd scoop it out with a bucket and pour it in the bath and then when you had that in you put a bit of cold in and you'd hop in the bath. I mean you didn't have hot and cold taps. That wasn't on in the early days.

SR: How often would you have a bath?

TM: Once a week, probably on Friday I think used to be the bath day. Of course, my mum while she wouldn't have a bath, a hot bath, my mum used to get us and strip us off and sponge us all over and put us all over and put us in our pyjamas and into bed. But there's a lot of funny instances as far as a bath's concerned. And that's how they used to do the washing, by the way. They'd put all their clothes in the copper, fill it up with water and light the fire and boil it up. There was no washing machines and they used to boil it and then pull it out and rinse it and hang it on the line: that's how you used to boil your clothes clean. But a funny incident I must tell you about in Walker Street when we were living in Walker Street. The bathroom was at the back of the house and the house was brick but the bathroom was weatherboard and then the backyard continued down and behind the bathroom was an open shed with the copper fireplace and the tubs out there. Anyhow, there was a plague of rats, big rats, and my dad tried everything and he wasn't getting on top of these rats; they were still winning the fight. So him and about three or four of his mates decided they'd come up with a brilliant idea. Our bathroom at the time, the baths weren't like they are these days. They weren't made out of plastics and stuff like that, they were all galvanised iron baths and they were shaped. Anyhow, that was inside the bathroom and then there was a weatherboard wall and then the backyard.

40.02

They come up with this brilliant idea. The rats were that cheeky they were running around everywhere; you could see them. So my dad and three or four of his mates they got hold of some shotguns and they got down the backyard and there was a big shed at the back of the yard too – it was stables, actually – and they sat facing up the yard at night and they had the lights and things and they'd see a rat and they'd go "boom". Everyone was locked inside the house; you couldn't get hurt inside. Anyhow, they were going out there for about three or four hours; there was dead rats everywhere. O.K, they were quite happy with that but the funniest part about it was a couple of days later come Friday was bath night and when we filled the bath up there was four thousand holes in the bath. It had gone right through the weatherboard timber and went straight through the bathtub; it was leaking like a sieve. I never forgot that. I was a kid and I laughed for a fortnight over that; I thought it was fantastic so I didn't have to have a bath. They never even thought that what wasn't hitting the rats was going through the timber wall – it was only weatherboard. Yes, that was a beauty; dad had to buy a new bath but, oh, gee, I thought that was funny.

SR: How did the Depression affect your father and your mother?

TM: Well, like everyone else I mean it made life pretty tough; it was a struggle. I mean you're asking me something now that it was very, very early days for me in the Depression. I think the Depression finished, I'm not sure, about '32 or something like that, '32 or '33. Well, I was only seven or eight years of age or something like that when it was over. I'm not exactly sure of the date of the Depression; I know it was in that particular date and that time.

42.02 **SR: Would you describe your mother as a happy person?**

TM: Oh, my mother was extremely happy, always laughing and joking and was the life of the party.

SR: What about your father?

TM: Well, a little more reserved. As I said, he was very reserved in that way.

SR: Now, were there a lot of kids in the neighbourhood?

TM: Yes.

SR: How many when you say that?

TM: Well, when you say "the neighbourhood", Redfern's a pretty big place. I mean it's a pretty big neighbourhood.

SR: Well, the area that you sort of - - -

TM: The area that I lived in, where I can remember most of the kids was in the Walker Street area when we moved to Walker Street, yes. I played with a group of about fifteen or twenty kids, I suppose

SR: And most families, were they large? Like how many kids?

TM: Yes, most of them were large families, most of them.

SR: So what makes "large", what's "large"?

TM: Well, I don't know, four, six, eight kids, I suppose.

SR: What was the ethnic mix over there, what was that?

TM: Now, you've got to a very interesting point. Now, I don't know how well you know Redfern but between Redfern, in Elizabeth Street Redfern, from Kettle Street which was the Australian 11 Hotel and billiard room corner, down to Phillip Street – that's about halfway, half the block between Redfern Street and Phillip Street – all along that portion there of Elizabeth Street opposite the park they were all Indians and there was all old shops there with awnings on them all the way along from

the Australian 11 Hotel at Kettle Street down to Phillip Street. And all the old Indians used to sit out on boxes and that with big turbans on their head and they to all sit there, smoking, and their big moustaches and bears. All along there were Indians. Now, I don't know, I mean people talk today about immigrants and wogs and whatever you like – I don't know what they call them these days – but, you know, these were Indians and nobody ever called them anything but Indians.

44.10 Now, a funny thing. On the other side of the Australian 11 Hotel up to Redfern Street was all Lebanese people and there were some very, very nice people that I got to know quite well. There was the Norman family, there was the Cooreys [?]. Look, I just can't recall all their names offhand because it's getting back a long way but around in Walker Street which was the next street up from Elizabeth Street our backyard used to run into a lane that run down into Elizabeth Street and was only two doors from where my dad had the scrap metal business and there was a lady up the road, her name was Del Malouf. Now, she was Lebanese and there was quite a few 'round there and the ethnic were not as many as what there is today but in that one little block I'd say there was half and half, ethnic people and Australian families.

SR: I believe there was a Lebanese church on Walker Street.

TM: That was the one I'm talking about, yes. That's opposite the Albert View Hotel.

SR: And do you know who the pastor was? Did you know that family?

TM: Yes. His name was Shehadie. I knew the son too.

SR: And did you play with all those kids? The kids from all the different ethnic groups, was there free interaction?

TM: Well, as I say I don't recall a lot of ethnic kids. There was the Shehadie family – they were in the church – there was my cousin that lived two doors from there in Walker Street - he's John Judge - and myself, that's three of us and a couple of other kids 'round there. We used to get together quite a bit, yes.

46.00 **SR: What about Aboriginal people?**

TM: Not too many at that stage in Redfern that I can recall, not that I can recall. There were the odd ones here and there.

SR: Do you know any names of the Aboriginal families from that time?

TM: No, I don't, no, I don't. There was never the concentration in those days of Aboriginals in Redfern that there are now, particularly around Eveleigh Street, they just weren't there.

SR: O.K. Well, who were your friends?

TM: Well, there was a young bloke over the road called Jimmy Gascoyne - he was a friend of mine, good mate - my cousin, Johnny Judge, Nicky Shehadie who is Sir Nicholas now - he was a pretty good friend of mine. I don't know if he'd still recall me; it's many years since I've seen him, many, many years, but when we were kids we used to play together. A stack of other kids, the Pettit [?] kids. There was Les Pettit and his family down on the corner - I think there were three or four Pettit boys. There were plenty of kids around.

SR: And what sort of families did they come from?

TM: About the same as mine: hardworking mother and father, or dad worked in a factory somewhere or something like that, you know, hardworking people.

SR: And were you welcome to go into each other's homes?

TM: You could go into each other's homes pretty much as if it was your own home. Like I said before, you didn't go to bed with your windows closed and doors closed. You had the hot summer's night the doors were wide open, the windows wide open, nobody ever touched anything. And when you think about it, in an area like we were living there in Walker Street that reminds me very much of Neighbourhood Watch these days and it was a neighbourhood watch without being formed into a particular group; it was just like Neighbourhood Watch. What they're trying to do with Neighbourhood Watch these days is caring and sharing together and that's how it was.

48.04 You'd borrow your cup of tea or you'd borrow half a cup of sugar or a you'd borrow a teaspoon full of salt or whatever, you know what I mean, a half a loaf of bread and everybody did it. It just wasn't "us" or "them", everybody did it. Everybody did it and they all shared and cared together and if anyone was sick, good God, you'd have a houseful of people there trying to help and the neighbours from across the road'd be washing up while mum was looking after the baby and all that sort of thing.

SR: But people just didn't go into people's houses and take half a loaf of bread or anything, did they?

TM: No, no, no, no. They used to knock on the door and they used to say “Mum sent me over and said have you got half a loaf of bread, please?” and “Oh, sure” because next week, as I said earlier, you might find yourself without half a loaf of bread; you'd go over and borrow half a loaf of bread off them.

SR: Were people very private about their lives, about their families and their troubles?

TM: Well, things were different in those days to what they are now. I'm not going to suggest that things didn't happen in those days that happen now because they did, but things happened behind closed doors in those days, not like promiscuity and sexual goings on that's happening today, I mean nothing like that happened in the open. If your daughter got pregnant and wasn't married, well, I mean that was a terrible thing, terrible, terrible thing.

SR: And what would happen?

TM: Well, I wouldn't say people would scorn her but people'd, they'd be looking over the top of their glasses and “Ooh, what a dreadful thing to happen” and all that sort of thing. And, of course, you felt much the same about it too but it was your daughter or something like, you know what I mean – and not necessarily my daughter – but today people don't take any notice of that sort of thing.

SR: It was a disgrace, was it?

TM: More or less. It wasn't very ladylike, you know. It was a bit of a disgrace, yes. Well, I wouldn't say a disgrace but it was scorned and frowned upon, you know.

50.06 **SR: So if that happened in a family would it be sort of covered up as much as possible?**

TM: Yes, yes.

SR: Ever hear of abortions happening?

TM: Very rarely. No, I could honestly say no.

SR: Well, getting back to when you were a bit younger, hopefully, and didn't know about these things, when you were kids like eight or so what did you and your mates do, what did you do together?

TM: Well, we raced marbles down the street. Opposite our place in Walker Street Redfern there used to be a big open paddock, it was a vacant block of land, and they used to have big concrete pipes, I suppose a

metre and a half high, you know, great big water pipes, I think concrete and we used to run in and out of them and play in and out of them and climb over them and hide and seek. And you'd be throwing tennis balls or playing cricket out in the street with a lump of wood; nobody had flash cricket bats and things like that.

SR: Can you remember any adventures that you had?

TM: Not particularly. Only maybe when I was a Boy Scout and like you went away for the weekend with the Scouts and went up to Woronora River and the Scoutmaster had a little putt-putt boat and I always thought it was fantastic. We thought we were Vikings and every other sort of thing, you know, and just going up Woronora River in a boat. That was terrific. We never, ever saw those things, though.

SR: Before when I was talking to you you mentioned about kids knocking off the lead from the roofs of houses. Tell us about that.

TM: Did I mention that?

SR: Yes, you did.

TM: Did I?

SR: Yes.

TM: Well, there were kids – and no names, no pack drill – but it was quite common for the kids to get up, particularly down the railway sheds down off Exhibition Park off Cleveland Street, and they used to get up and pinch all the lead flashing and stuff off the roof and go and sell it for scrap metal, get a few bob. That's as much as I know about it.

52.14 **SR: What did you do with the money?**

TM: I didn't do anything with it. I didn't get any of it.

SR: Right. But when kids got hold of money in those days - - -

TM: Well, they'd run around and buy cigarettes or something like that, I suppose.

SR: Did you go to the movies?

TM: Yes. We used to go up to the Lawson Theatre which is not there anymore - that was in Lawson Street Redfern. We used to go to the Empire Theatre on the corner of Cleveland Street and Walker Street. That's still there but it's not a picture theatre now, I don't think. Yes, we used to go to the theatre, yes.

SR: What was your favourite movie?

TM: In those days? I don't know, Tom Mix, I suppose, or one of the cowboy pictures.

SR: Well, how far did you roam as a kid when you were hanging out with your friends and out of the eyes of your parents, out of their vision?

TM: Not very far, not very far. We could find enough trouble around the local area without going too far.

SR: What's some of the trouble you found?

TM: Well, I don't know, really. We didn't get into much trouble.

SR: No, I know you never got into much trouble probably because you weren't caught.

TM: Well, like they used to pinch the lead off the roofs and things like that. I think they snitched a bit off the Lebanese church up on the corner of Walker Street. I won't tell you who was involved in that but there was a few involved in that and quite surprisingly some people that'd give you a surprise who was involved in it but then again that happened, sort of thing. I don't know that they got much off. I was only told these things, you see.

SR: Did you go scrounging around the factories? There were a lot of factories there and there would be all sorts of - - -

54.01 TM: Well, what we used to do, in those days you'd get money for bottles, empty bottles, but I'm not talking about just scrap. If you could find a lemonade bottle, a Shelley's lemonade bottle or a Marchants lemonade bottle or a ginger beer bottle or something, you'd take it back to the shop and they'd give you a penny or tuppence for an empty bottle and they'd reuse them. They'd take them all away and wash them and reuse them. No, I don't recall anything. See, money wasn't a big problem in those days because there wasn't any around. Everyone had about same amount: nothing.

SR: Were there any places you were not allowed to go?

TM: You mean by my parents?

SR: Yes.

TM: Yes. I just can't recall them but, yes, I can recall being vetoed on different spots by dad.

SR: And what would that be?

TM: Well, for instance those concrete pipes that I spoke of, my dad used to say “Keep out of there. You’ll break your bloody leg. You’ll kill yourself in there. You’ll fall off them or something like that” and sure enough one day I fell and there’s the scar there that I got. Of course, my dad used to work at the back of where we lived and they run through and got him. Mum had my sister at dancing lessons or something or other and he had to run through and bandage me leg up. He said “I told you, I told you”. Well, I didn’t go over there too often after that.

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

TM: Yes, there’d be a few drunks rolling around the place on Saturday nights and that sort of thing; you always kept away from them.

SR: Were you actually as a child out on the streets in the evenings, like Saturday nights?

TM: No. When I say “Saturday nights” I’m talking around about five and six o’clock in the afternoon. That’s when the pubs closed. You’ve got to remember that the pubs closed at six o’clock so it wasn’t very late on Saturday night when the pubs closed and when the drunks started to get around.

56.02

Of course at those times too there used to be a police patrol, a wagon – they used to call it the paddy wagon – and they used to drive around, grabbing all the drunks and shooting them in the back of the wagon and take them over to the police station and lock them up for four hours for being drunk.

SR: Can you remember any of the local police?

TM: No, not in my early days, not when I was a kid, no.

SR: Did you hear any stories about them?

TM: Yes, yes, I heard a lot of stories about them. Like “Look out. Here comes the coppers” and everyone’d scarper and nobody ever trusted a policeman when I was a kid. Vastly different today, to what I know today. I suppose I know half the police at Redfern Police Station and they’re all pretty good blokes.

SR: And why weren’t they trusted in those days?

TM: Well, I think it was just the times, that’s the way things were: “Coppers are no good. Look out. Here they come, the bludgers” and all this caper.

SR: Were there any people that you were particularly encouraged to be with who were locally admired and thought to be a good influence?

TM: Not really, no. You're talking about my younger days?

SR: Yes.

TM: No, not really.

SR: O.K. Well, you've mentioned before a bit about you going to school. How did the teachers treat you generally?

TM: Pretty strict, most of them were pretty strict but most of them were pretty good. There was only the one guy and he was a pretty tough man.

SR: And did most of the local kids go to the state schools?

TM: No. At the time I think Mount Carmel used to be the main Catholic school and my cousin used to go there – lived up near the Lebanese church in Walker Street - and, of course, we used to get around together and I used to wag school occasionally and go to school with him at Mount Carmel for a day or two, you know, just a bit of a break away, I don't know.

58.11 **SR: How did they cope with that?**

TM: I don't know how we managed it, I can't recall, but I can recall going there and I got sick and tired of getting up and down off me knees all days and "That's it. I'm going back to George Street" or wherever I was at the time.

SR: What were the big events of the year for a kid?

TM: The big events of the year were South Sydney football for a start while the football season was on; that was the big event of the year.

SR: Did you go to the games?

TM: Every game I could get to I did. And they used to play right opposite because we were on one side of the street and they were on the other, the oval, Redfern Oval – they used to play at Redfern Oval. Sure, yes, even right up to the latter years and I'm talking about even when I come home from the war up to the early '50s and that I used to go to all the games.

SR: And were they really popular amongst the local people?

TM: Well, if you didn't have a red and green eye you wasn't from Redfern.

SR: What else, what other big events of the year?

TM: I think one of the biggest events as far as the kids were concerned was Cracker Night. You know, families used to buy us all the crackers and they'd give us spending money or we'd go and buy the crackers or something. We used to buy what they called a basket bomb. It was a square one about that square and it was wrapped in cane and had a wick and they used to call them a basket bomb and we used to run around whacking them in all everybody's letterbox and blow their letterbox up. We'd the letterbox or we'd put them under a kerosene tin. Do you know what a kerosene tin is? Well, a lot of the families used those for buckets in those days because they couldn't afford to go and buy a bucket but they used to use an empty kerosene tin with a bit of wire for a handle. And we used to grab them and take them out and turn them upside down with a basket bomb and when the basket bomb went off the kerosene tin used to go about a hundred foot in the air.

60.07

And the big bonfires, we used to light them in the middle of the road at Walker Street and all the streets. You'd be piling on the wood, all day, all day they'd be piling things on the bonfire and they used to light the bonfires and it'd be nothing to have a bonfire as big as this room and they'd just set her away and away she'd go and, oh, there's be crackers and Tom Thumbs and starlights and sparklers and jumping jacks. Oh, that was a big night, big night.

SR: And all the families from the street came?

TM: Oh, everyone in the street would be out, yes, everyone in the street would be out yes. But we used to cause a bit of trouble with our basket bombs in the letterboxes because they used to all be made out of light tin, light metal, and when you let them go they'd just go "boom" and blow them apart. They used to chase us and abuse us for weeks about blowing their letterboxes up.

SR: Were there other events? I have heard of a circus going to Redfern. Do you recall?

TM: There used to be a circus. Yes, there used to be a circus go to – I'm just not sure – I think Wirth's Circus used to go into Prince Alfred Park. I'm pretty sure that's where they used to go, not into Redfern Park, into Prince Alfred Park down near Cleveland Street School. Yes, I went to the circus there many times. And also in the park at that time was the Exhibition Building. It was a huge old building and they used to have a

museum in there and then they got rid of the museum and they opened it up as a roller-skating rink and I went there many, many times. Well, eventually they pulled it down and got rid of it and that's where your ice-skating rink and your pool is these days in Prince Alfred Park.

SR: What kind of a museum was in there before?

62.01 TM: They had airplanes and some of Kingsford Smith's airplanes and things like that. I don't know if it was a war museum, I'm just not sure now but I know they had some of the airplanes and things.

SR: Did local kids go there quite a bit?

TM: Oh, yes, yes, yes, they did.

SR: And was it free entry?

TM: That I can't say. I don't think so but that I can't say, I can't recall.

Tape 2

SR: Interview with Ted McDermott, 5th of October 1994, tape 2. We were talking about big events in the year and what kids did and you said you used to go roller-skating.

TM: Yes.

SR: One thing I wanted to know is was there any sort of social distinction between say the Redfern kids and the Newtown or Alexandria kids?

TM: No, not between the Redfern, Newtown and Alexandria kids but maybe if you struck somebody from the North Shore it was a little bit different or something like that or out the eastern suburbs.

SR: Did you ever meet kids from the North Shore or eastern suburbs?

TM: On rare occasions, on rare occasions.

SR: But I have this impression that kids stuck together and had their friends from their own local neighbourhood.

TM: That's right. You didn't wander too far adrift, you didn't get too far. We used to go to Manly quite a lot and I don't know that it worried the kids so much. It might have been some sort of a stigma for the adults if anyone says "Oh, where do you live?" and they'd say "Redfern" or something like that but generally I've found that the people of Redfern didn't care what other people thought outside the area. Most people in Redfern got all right together. I suppose there were different groups

that were antagonistic towards each other and that but I didn't strike it much.

64.13 **SR: Well, what groups would be antagonistic toward each other?**

TM: Well, I don't know, that's what I'm saying. I never heard anyone had anything bad to say. We had, as I said before, the Indians and the Lebanese and the Lebanese people I had quite a bit to do with them and even in my latter years when I was working for dad in the scrap metal we had quite a few of them working for us and I can never, ever recall any friction or anything like that between us because they were Lebanese. Never. The Indians, of course, they were a different group altogether. I don't even know what they did. They had shops and I don't even know what sort of shops they were. They never interfered with us and we never interfered with them that I can recall.

SR: But they were like a separate group?

TM: Yes.

SR: Whereas the Lebanese were more integrated?

TM: Yes.

SR: Did the Redfern kids say ever play cricket or any sporting competitions against kids from Waterloo?

TM: I suppose they did, more at a school level than anything else, I would imagine. For instance, I wasn't allowed to play football. My mother wouldn't let me play football because she reckoned it was too rough. Like even in latter years I went into the school choir and things like that. That's where my interests were rather than sporting but that's not to say that I didn't do sports during my lifetime. I did and I got quite a long way along the line.

66.02 I did get quite a long way along the line in most sports. I could play tennis quite well. If the war hadn't interrupted when it did in 1939 I'd have been a roller-skating champion, speed skating champion, because I was very, very good at it even at a young age. I used to go to St Paul's Church down on the corner of Cleveland Street and Regent Street. It's still there and the Scouts used to meet there – I just forget – I think it was a Wednesday night and after that I used to put my skates on at the scout hall and skate right through Prince Alfred Park and I'd be taking my shirt off as I went. I had a T-shirt sort of thing underneath and I used to skate into the skating rink and straight out onto the floor and get on me mark in a race. It started at nine o'clock or whatever and I had to be there then and I used to skate through the park and

skate in and I won my share of races and things like that and I was going quite well at it and that was one sport that I participated in. I met my wife at roller-skating, only it wasn't down there; it was at the sports arena in Surry Hills when I come home from the war. I was skating around and my wife and her friends always thought I was a bit of a ratbag because I was always whizzing here and whizzing there and I played roller hockey with the South Sydney roller hockey team but I was skating around backwards and I bumped into this girl and knocked her over and I turned around and it was my wife – I didn't know she was at the time. And my mum happened to be at the skating rink that particular night, sitting on the side, and my wife looked up at me and she said "You knocked me over" and I says "I'm sorry". She said "Well, pick me up". So I picked her up and on her feet, then I hung onto her hand and I skated across to me mother and I said "Mum, this is the girl I'm going to marry" and sure enough I did.

68.00

There you go. Whether I meant it at the time or not I can't recall but I did. She's the girl I married and that was at roller-skating. But there were quite a lot of things. We used to go swimming, we used to go out to Coogee Aquarium, we used to go out to Coogee. My dad used to get us up at six o'clock in the morning some mornings, five o'clock in the morning, and take us out to Coogee and we used to swim in the surf for an hour before he went to work and then we'd come home. I mean people still do these things these days but they did them in those days too but the difference is that people couldn't afford to do those sorts of things too often in those days. But I always had me money, I used to pay into the roller-skating rink and my mum and dad used to always give it to me. That was my sport. My sister played tennis and in latter years I played tennis. We used to play on the south courts 'round here at Rosebery. They've gone now, they've disappeared, but I got up into a reserve grade 'round there as a young boy and I could've carried that on but I didn't. I don't know, things just change.

SR: Was it the war?

TM: Well, the war had most things to do with it, yes. The war disturbed a lot of things in a lot of people's lives. I went overseas and when I come back I was a few years older and I don't know if my interests had changed or if I'd changed or what but I continued to roller-skate and, as I say, that's where I met my wife. I had bicycles. We used to do a lot of bike riding, not racing or anything like that but we used to ride bikes everywhere. Used to go to the pictures quite a bit, we used to go to a lot of dances.

SR: Where were the dances at?

TM: Over at Surreyville in City Road up near Grace Brothers there in City Road, just off Cleveland Street.

SR: At what age did you start going to dances?

TM: After I come home, I don't know.

SR: After the war?

TM: No, I went to a few before I went to the war - I was seventeen, eighteen - and then when I come home, well, that's the sort of things we used to do.

70.03 **SR: Getting back to say the '30s, how would you describe the neighbourhood – what was Redfern like then?**

TM: Well, Redfern in my young days, I wouldn't say it was a salubrious sort of a suburb, salubrious, I might have the wrong word, I don't know. But the homes, most of the homes were old places, dilapidated, not well-kept – outside I'm talking about. Inside they were kept as well as they could be kept and quite clean and everybody washed their bed linen and stuff quite regularly. I can't ever recall, there may have been families that weren't too particular about it but in our own family, in the very early days in my grandmother's home I know the whole house was spotless and I know when we moved, mum and dad and the family move on their own into their own homes I know they were spotless and by gee whiz if they weren't I was in trouble but we were always brought up that cleanliness is next to godliness sort of thing.

SR: Was it a mixture of residential and industrial?

TM: Yes. Now, for instance I was born in Castlereagh Street on the Phillip Street side of the South Sydney Leagues Club. Now, next door to the terrace of houses where I was born there was a big carrying yard. There was horses and carts and trucks, very early model trucks, with a big galvanised iron fence around it and big double gates and I think they put ashes and hosed them down and made it hard, not concrete and all. That was because that's what everybody did in those days because concrete and stuff wasn't as big a thing as what it is now.

72.01 A little bit further down from South Sydney, around about where the South Sydney Leagues Club's parking area is, was a huge factory and I've talked it over since you rang you rang me with a number of people and I couldn't get a picture of the name. Brick for brick I could nearly draw the factory and the name was in huge letters probably four or five foot high on the top of the building and I couldn't get a picture in my mind of the name of the place and I've asked different friends of mine

and I rang my cousin that was born three days after me and she couldn't recall it; she could recall the factory but she couldn't recall the name. And lo and behold yesterday morning I walked out and sat down at the table and the name went whack, like that, and I saw it. It was Hunter's Shoes and it was a big shoe factory and lots of people used to work there. Now, a little bit further down the road from there, not far from there, was F.H. Faulding's. And, of course, you've got to remember in this time most of the carrying and carting was done by horse and cart and I can picture the horses and cart getting along Castlereagh Street, going in and out the gates with these loads of different stuff on them, you know, right opposite the park. And the park, I don't know if it's still there. I've been into Redfern Park but never into the middle of it - I've been to the War Memorial on ANZAC Day and that's just on the corner there of the park. In the middle there used to be a fountain - I don't know if it's still there - and it used to have a steel spiked fence around it and that was always going and there was always some sort of activity in the park and people walked in the park even late at night. You could walk there without fear. It wouldn't matter if it was one o'clock in the morning, you could walk through the park and you wouldn't have any fear of getting molested or bashed or kicked or anything like that. Even women could walk through there on their own but, yes, things have changed, things have change. And I don't know if you know where the South Sydney Police Boys' Club is on the corner of Phillip Street and Elizabeth Street.

74.03

That's quite a huge building now but prior to that there was a family that used to have originally in Walker Street, on the corner of Kettle Street and Walker Street, a little shop. A fellow named Claude Buck used to own it. He was an Englishman that come out here, a Pommy, and he come out here and he had a little family and he used to have the moulds and he used to make little lead soldiers and his wife and all the kids and all'd sit there, painting; after they come out of the mould they'd paint the uniforms and things on them by hand. Well, eventually he got out of that and went 'round the corner where the Police Boys' Club is now and there was a huge shop on the corner before the Police Boys' Club and that become Buck's Hamburger Shop and it was one of the biggest hamburger shops I've ever struck in my life and that used to be a focal point. It joined up with the Indian's in Elizabeth Street; that's where it started, where they ended, and it went 'round the corner and at the back of it was a wood and coal yard. Now, I don't know if you know what a wood and coal yard is but that's where they used to sell firewood and coal and coke and that was owned by the Clark [?] Brothers; that was Clarkie's Coal Yard, see. But Claude Buck and his wife and his young kids, family, they had that hamburger shop there for

many years. Well, then they disappeared away from there and many, many years later – and I'm going back probably twenty five years ago – we went to the Central Coast, my wife and I, we went up there holidaying - we eventually bought a block of land up there – but who do you think had a big shop in Toukley? Claude Buck and his wife and we run into them and renewed the association all over again. Unfortunately, they've all passed away now but their family's still up there.

SR: And in terms of economics were most people working people or were there professionals - was there a mix of economic status?

75.57 TM: Well, I was thinking about things. After you rung I was thinking about things and especially reading that sheet that you gave me and right opposite our place in Walker Street there was a man named Mr Raymond and he was a jeweller. Well, people sort of used to look up to him because he always seemed to have a lot more money than everybody else. So I don't know if you'd call him a professional, whether a jeweller in those days was a pretty good sort of a trade or business. He lived in Redfern but he travelled to his shop, wherever that was, and where that was I wouldn't know but he was quite a nice old man; he was an old man.

SR: Were there any others?

TM: Not that I know of. I suppose at times a lot of them thought my dad was, you know, pretty well stacked up with his car and everything. He had a brand new car in 1937.

SR: Did most people have cars?

TM: Well, at the time I think we were about the only motorcar in Walker Street. No, cars weren't – gee whiz, you talk about cars. Heavens above, how many tapes have you got if you want me to talk about cars. Like we used to have open tourers and we used to have side curtains that fitted on the side to keep the weather out and we'd go to the Blue Mountains or somewhere and the fog'd be that bad that one of my uncles or someone'd walk along in front of the car with a hurricane lamp to make sure you didn't drive off the side of the road. And we'd be crawling along at about two miles an hour to get over the mountains at night-time in the fog and that sort of thing; you couldn't see your hand in front of you.

SR: When you were a kid did you go on holidays very often?

TM: Yes, yes.

SR: Where would you go?

TM: We'd go down to Lake Illawarra, mostly down to Lake Illawarra, camping. And dad used to drive us down because, as I say, dad used to work at all the events that were on, like races and things, and he'd take us down and pitch the tent, put all the gear in the tent, install mum and us, the kids, and he'd have to drive back to Sydney to go to work and we wouldn't see him till the next weekend and we'd be sometimes down there for a month. And he'd come down every weekend, Friday night or a Saturday or whatever and Sunday, I just can't recall when.

78.10 **SR: And you'd go to the beach?**

TM: Yes. We'd spend a month or so down there on the beach and I had my first ride in an airplane down there. On the beach there used to be a Tiger Moth. That was a two-seater plane, open plane, and it used to land and the guy used to give joyrides and that's where I had my first ride in an airplane was on the Lake Illawarra Beach. So they're some of the things that used to happen. And, of course, when you went to a camping area like that and you were going there year after year just you used to find that they're all the same people there every time you went down and everybody got to know everybody like in Redfern and they used to have the campfire of a night and we used to sit 'round the campfire, singsongs and a bit of, not a party, but a singsong and just swapping yarns. Some of the old people'd sit down and tell you tales and that was a big thing in the old days too when I was a kid. All the older people seemed to have a little tale they could tell you and then they'd start talking and they'd say "And then, of course, you had to watch this fellow because he used to sneak in" and the kids used to be sitting down and they were storytelling and they used to tell some good yarns too – I can't recall any of them.

SR: And did you go down there every January, did you?

TM: Yes, December, Christmas, December into January.

SR: Would you spend Christmas down at Illawarra?

TM: Yes.

SR: Rather than with the families?

TM: Not always, not always. No, no, no, I tell a lie, I suppose - you've refreshed my memory. We used to spend Christmas with our parents and grandmother until they passed away and then after that, well, we didn't get together as a family as much as we used to with uncles and aunts although we used to see a lot of each other nonetheless.

SR: You mentioned before that kids for a bit of fun would scale the trams and hitch a bit of a lift.

TM: Yes, that's right.

80.03 **SR: Did kids get hurt doing stuff like that?**

TM: A lot of kids got killed doing it.

SR: Really?

TM: A lot of kids got killed doing it, yes, because I'm talking about the open toast rack trams they used to call them and the reason they called them a toast rack tram was you could get on from either side and they had little compartments. There'd be a seat in each side and you'd sit down and then there'd be another compartment with a seat facing each way and you'd go in and out a door either side. You were only supposed to get on and off one side – that's the side nearest the footpath – but you only had to slide the doors open on the other side and you could go out the other side. Now, you could either scale the trams on the off side, which was the wrong side, and be very careful of the trams coming the other way or you'd wait till the guard was down the back end of the tram and you'd jump on the front or you'd wait till he went up the front and you'd jump on the back and when he'd start to come down towards you you'd bail out, you'd jump off. Generally, the guard's used to say "Hey, get out of there". They used to walk along and that's how they used to collect the fares. They had a bag on they would strap over their shoulder and they used to walk along, come to the compartment and say "Fares, please" and he'd be standing out – even in the rain they used to be standing outside.

SR: Did anybody you know get killed?

TM: I vaguely recall someone but I can't remember his name and that, yes.

SR: And did you just do it for the dare?

TM: Just for fun.

SR: Fun?

TM: Yes.

SR: What smells can you remember of Redfern?

TM: Smells?

SR: In the '30s, what smells do you associate with the area?

TM: Mainly cooking around where you lived because everybody cooked in those days. It's not like today; they don't ring up and get a pizza or TV dinners or things like that; everybody cooked their meals. There was no fast takeaways and that sort of thing. Actually, the Buck's Hamburger Shop was one of the first to change that way of thinking and that way of living. People used to go there and eat, they started to go there and eat, and then there was more hamburger shops sprung up everywhere and that sort of thing and that was about the start of the change.

82.14 **SR: When was that, what year would you put on that?**

TM: I suppose that'd be sixty four, sixty five years ago.

SR: Years ago?

TM: Yes.

SR: O.K.

TM: No, no, no, no, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, not Buck's Hamburger Shop. No, I'm wrong, I'm incorrect, it wouldn't be that long ago; about fifty four or fifty five years ago that sort of thing.

SR: O.K. What image or sight or image comes to your mind when you think of Redfern in the '30s?

TM: Well, a lot of people walking places instead of riding for a start. Trams, horses and carts, barefooted kids.

SR: Were you barefooted?

TM: Never. We were fortunate, we were lucky.

SR: You mentioned earlier before we started about you having a horse.

TM: That's right.

SR: How old were you when you got the horse?

TM: I was about fourteen.

SR: Not as a young child?

TM: Thirteen or fourteen. I might have been a bit younger; I might have been twelve. I got it when I lived in Walker Street.

SR: Where did you keep it?

TM: In a stable down the back; we had a big stable. All the houses running of Walker Street went right through to a laneway towards Elizabeth Street and there used to be a back lane and the houses on Elizabeth Street used to back onto that lane also. But we had the house, the bathroom and the laundry facilities under the shed, then a yard and then the big long shed in the back. Everybody had them. They were like stables and I used to stable the horse and bring him up the lane at the back and bring him into the stable and stable him there.

84.08 **SR: Where would you ride?**

TM: I used to get on him and I used to ride over to Centennial Park and ride 'round Centennial Park. There was nowhere else to ride. I mean you've got to understand there wasn't the traffic in those days that there is these days.

SR: Did other kids have horses as well?

TM: I never knew of anyone else in Redfern, any other kid in Redfern having a horse.

SR: You were lucky.

TM: Yes, I was extremely lucky. And, of course, mum did me up in jodhpurs and we had a pretty good life.

SR: Can you remember any sounds that you associate with Redfern?

TM: No, only the broadcast of the races and that; on a Saturday afternoon you could hear them everywhere.

SR: People were big gamblers?

TM: Well, I wouldn't say they were big gamblers but most people were gamblers, yes.

SR: What about drinking, drinkers?

TM: Pretty heavy there. I mean I didn't know too many guys that didn't get off the tram and go and have a couple of beers before they went home and that sort of thing.

SR: What major changes have you seen?

TM: Well, all of Redfern Oval changed for a start. I mean that's all been fenced in and big hills put right around it and that sort of thing. There was a few little mounds around it and that in the early days. I think the old grandstand's there and that sort of thing but it's changed dramatically. The big changes in Castlereagh Street South, all that

Hunter Shoes Factory and Faulding's and that, they're all gone and they've got a big leagues club there now. Over in Elizabeth Street where the Indians and Lebanese people were and up where the Lebanese church was and the Albert View (the Bloodhouse) was, that's all gone and there's all high-rise and flats even right down to the South Sydney Police Boys' Club. That's about the only original thing that was there.

86.01 **SR: When did the major changes start?**

TM: Gee, I don't know, I don't know. I suppose it could be – I don't know, I can't recall how far back that was. It's been there a while now.

SR: Was there a time when locals started to move out of the area?

TM: Well, we moved out of the area and most of the people that I knew and that we were involved with around the area they were still there when we moved and when they moved I just wouldn't know. We went from Walker Street out to Rosebery.

SR: And why did you move?

TM: Well, dad bought a house out there.

SR: Right.

TM: That was the first house he ever bought.

SR: And why didn't he buy one in Redfern?

TM: I wouldn't know. I never, ever asked him.

SR: What's your happiest memory as a child?

TM: As a child? I think it was having the family that I had.

SR: What about your saddest memory?

TM: One of my saddest memories and I wouldn't say it was *the* saddest but one of the saddest memories that I can recall, my grandmother's mother lived in Morehead Street – that's the next street over from Walker Street – and she lived alone and she died when she was ninety nine. And she lived in this little cottage and as a kid I don't think ever a week went by that I didn't go up there – not only me but all the cousins and all, they used to go up and see her; she was a lovely old woman – and used to go and talk and sit there and she used to mesmerise me. She'd be sewing beads on doilies and things like that and, you know, her little glasses on her nose like this and she'd be sitting at the table at the front window - and all dark, the house was dark except for the light

coming through the window – and she used to sit there and I used to sit there and talk to her for hours.

88.06

She was a lovely old thing and anyhow she died at ninety nine and that upset us all. That was a very sad time for me because I miss my Granny Ella - her name was Ella. And you remember I showed you the tightrope walker? That was his mother too and it was my grandmother's mother and life just didn't seem the same after that without Granny Ella. Ninety nine she died and lived on her own right till her death, right till the finish.

SR: And how old were you when she died?

TM: Oh, gee. I don't know, I suppose I was twelve or thirteen or something. I couldn't say for sure.

SR: And what's your most vivid memory?

TM: Of what, childhood? If I told you you'd laugh. Well, when we went to school we used to wear sometimes – my mum was one for always dressing us up and making us look, you know, and you used to get knickerbockers and tuck them into your socks. Kids used to call them poop catchers. And I had my hat on and it's raining one day and I had my raincoat on and I had my poop catchers on. As I was coming home I had an accident. I go as far as the Somerset Hotel coming up Phillip Street and I had an accident and I couldn't wait until I got home, you know what I mean, I got caught out and they truly became poop catchers that day. And there's me standing there, I was terribly ashamed, and my sister come up behind me, leaving school she come up behind me and I said "Go and get mum, go and get mum". I wasn't going to move.

SR: How old were you?

TM: I don't know, I suppose about eight or nine, maybe six or seven or something, I don't know, I don't recall, but I'll never forget that day, I was so ashamed. And I only had a hundred yards to go to get home and here's me stuck outside the hotel, standing there, and I wasn't going to move. Oh, God, it was funny.

90.10

SR: Well, look, thank you very much. Is there anything that I haven't asked that I should have asked that you'd like to say?

TM: No, I don't think so, Sue. I think perhaps the only thing I could add that you probably haven't added is that it's a shame to see that the world is like it is today. I don't know where the world's going to finish. I know where it started because I was there when it started for me and most of

my life I've enjoyed it. It's only latter years that I haven't enjoyed. I've still got my family. I've got six children and I've got ten grandchildren and four great-grandchildren and my wife. We've got everything. I mean we're not wealthy people but we're quite comfortable. I've got my little dog as you can see but there's sad things that happen in the world and it doesn't necessarily need to be a death or anything like that and I suppose I could be called an old square but one of the things that hurts me most in this life and it does hurt me is to see the women losing their femininity and I don't mean all women. I don't think the women today are aware of what they're doing to themselves as far as their femininity is concerned. In my day, if a girl's skirt sort of blew above her knee, ooh, you know, but today they don't care what they wear. They don't care if they don't wear anything. I mean I'm not knocking it. It's quite nice but it's a shame to see it because I think they're losing their mystique. I often hear women sort of turn around and think "What's wrong with the guys today?" A lot of women can't get boyfriends. I think it's because the boyfriends, they're sick and tired.

92.02 They've worn out their welcome with the girls and they're going back with the boys now, you know what I mean. Well, that sort of thing never happened in my day and I think it's most unfortunate to see it and I'd like to see it go back where they wear the long skirts and a bit of ankle was a thrill.

SR: O.K. Well, look, thank you very much.

TM: O.K.

SR: Bye bye.

TM: O.K.

SR: That was good.

Interview ends