

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
REDFERN, WATERLOO AND ALEXANDRIA

Name: Cliff Noble

Date: 3 November 1994

Place: Alexandria

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR: Cliff Noble, 3rd of November 1994 at Alexandria.**

Thanks for talking to me, Mr Noble.

CN: See, I was born in the street in which I live seventy five years ago. My grandmother built this place in about 1908 and I've lived in the area because of the participation that I have with the local community. My father was an identity in the area. He was originally a plumber on the

railway and when Mr McKell become the Governor-General and left this seat vacant my father won the seat and he was an alderman at the Alexandria Council and he had a tremendous affinity with the local people. Just to give you an indication, on one occasion one of our local Irish people – which I'll talk about later because the area was predominantly Irish – this fellow got into trouble for an indiscretion. He used to drive a horse and cart, a tip wagon to be a fact, and you could do anything to him but don't touch his horse. The local police had the misfortune to touch his horse and they had the misfortune too because he was very good with fisticuffs and finished up getting three months in jail. Now, as a consequence of that he had about six or seven children and my father and a couple of others used to go 'round every Friday night to the hotels, collect money so that that family would not embarrassed; in all that time they looked after them. And this particular chap used to like the amber ale quite a lot and when he'd start to play up there'd be a knock on the door, his wife would be here. My father was the only one who could handle him and he used to make him go up and sign the pledge. Being Irish and being Catholic, the pledge was a very significant document and he used to bind my father to silence not to tell anybody that he'd signed the pledge, as if they wouldn't know.

2.11 From drinking copious amounts of grog all of a sudden he was off the grog for a period and he never, ever broke that pledge and he made many of them from three to six months. And this was the sort of thing that happened.

SR: What period are you talking about then?

CN: I'm talking about the period from about 1913 onwards, that's when it would be. My father was married 'round about 1910, I am the last of three boys and we've lived in the area all that period of time.

SR: So you've lived on Copeland Street?

CN: Copeland Street.

SR: And what year were you born in?

CN: 1918 so I'm seventy five at the present time. And my real love of the area was brought about because as a child there was all this sharing, caring and participation. If anybody in the street, there was a disability, there was sickness or that, the neighbours would come in, they would do the work, they would cook the meals, they would do the washing and sometimes they didn't even like the people but it was what had to be done. And my recollection of the area, because nobody had anything as soon as you come home from school the first thing "Get

your shoes off" and I must have been clumsy because I was always kicking the tops off my toes. And these lovely Irish women, they were short and dumpy with ample bosoms and they would grab you up and wrest you on there and talk to you and soothe all your cares away and this is the sort of thing that happened with them and it's always been thus, as I say.

4.00

Just to give you an illustration: in 1908 the government doing today what they done years ago, there was no funding for the medical distribution and they had what they called the Redfern Dispensary. Now, this Redfern Dispensary was closed in 1908 and a chap by the name of – he finished up Sir Joynton Smith, he called a public meeting, got his business associates and the local community and they decided that we need a hospital and this is how South Sydney Hospital was born and it was brought about by the fact that everything was made gratis to them. A chap by the name of Cooper who really, really owned more than half the area and half of the Waterloo and a big portion of Waterloo and he was really a fine man. He made the donation of two acres of land for South Sydney Hospital to be built on, he promised them five hundred pound which was a tremendous lot of money in that time, for the first patient that went in and then we got five hundred pound from what was known as Syrian Town. Syrian Town was the other side of Redfern Oval. They were all the Arabs and the Lebanese and the Greeks and they used to wear the great flowing robes, they were a participant. And then the Chinese community gave ninety pound. Now, wherever they got it because if ever you heard of man's inhumanity to man it was brought about by these particular people who they got the Chinese out and they worked three hundred and sixty five days a year from daylight to dark in their market gardens. Their reward was to be fed and on their demise their ashes would be sent back to China and so these are the sort of things. They talk about multiculturalism today; it's always been here. We had Syrian Town and there's a little area between Redfern and Waterloo which was known as Irishtown. Now, you only had to be Catholic and you had to be good producers of children to keep the faith going and then, of course, the Chinese.

6.05

Now, the Chinese used to operate most of the market gardens - so getting a little ahead of my story because it goes back to about 1823 when the first distribution of land grant was made. Now, this is what happened: a fellow by the name of Hutchison [?] got fourteen hundred acres and this Cooper come in and he bought it. Now, you would not know the area but over there adjacent what they call Henderson Road a chap by the name of King was granted ten acres to grow wheat. Can

you imagine wheat would grow in Alexandria? And most of the streets that you see 'round here, Hiles Street was a market gardener and they went all around the place with these market gardens and, of course, the poor old Chinese, as I say, they worked from daylight to dark and we as children used to really torment them. Because I can remember I suppose I got three good hidings in my life and one was for going over, pinching their vegetables and brought them home very proudly and when I put them down my father said "Where did you get them?" I said "I pinched them off the Chinks". And he gave me Chinks. He said "Don't you know that those poor fellows work from daylight to dark and you go over there and just steal their vegetables and bring them home? Now I'm going to make an example of you" and he did. Now, other things that we done to those poor Chinese, they had a great big fat draught horse, he could hardly fit in the shafts, and the only things that he knew was going from the market gardens down to the city markets and on the way back invariably the poor old Chinese like a tee(?) would go to sleep and we done the wrong thing, would turn the horse around and he'd go back to the markets - these were the sort of things that happened. And on one occasion a poor old - they called them in those days "Charlie" - he got home, the horse was outside the sliprails so we got in, we got down the sliprails, put the horse the other side of the sliprails and put the rails back and threw little stones at him to wake him up.

8.16 I don't know what he said but he must have called us for anything because he went like berserk. He couldn't make out how the horse got one side of the rails and the cart was the other. So we done all these silly, stupid, awful things to people and, of course, if you go 'round the district there was a joss house over there. And on one occasion it's rather an interesting sort of situation because some of them got buried, the wealthy ones got buried over here at Botany, and a couple of smart alecks was over there one day and, of course, at their Chinese funerals they put copious amounts of food on the grave and a couple of smarties said "Hey, Charlie, when's your mate coming up to eat the food?" and Charlie very politely says "The same time as your mate's coming up to smell the flowers". So you've got all these little incidents that happened and so this is what Alexandria is all about.

SR: Whereabouts were the Chinese farms that you were talking about?

CN: The Chinese farms went all over the other side of McEvoy Street in that area because this was where the off spin for this Shea's Creek it was known - finished up being known as Alexandria Creek but this always had arable land, the market gardens were there. The water used to

come down from what they call Hungry Hill up there at Mount Carmel and coming down through the sand hills it got cleansed and it all used to empty down to that sort of thing. And like not too many people know about but this was a mecca, an oasis in an area down here and when the industry came, that's when Shea's Creek started to go to pot because all the discharge was going into there. The fish went and, of course, the business where I told you, in four square miles because of the fact that we start from what was described as a pleasant rural village become this great big industrial complex.

- 10.10 There were five hundred and fifty factories in a four square mile area 'round here. Now, we didn't have any trouble getting labour because at that time an ex-premier or ex-prime minister, rather, of Australia was relative of a chap who lived up there, as I say, at Redfern. He run a carrying thing, named Buddy McMahan. Now, Buddy McMahan was a good, kind person. He would bring out these poor great big Irish people, strong backs and weak minds, he would doss them in with the horses to work out their fee, their fee for bringing them out, and as his business progressed he soon got to the stage where they had to start bringing out some Irish colleens and this was how Irishtown got created up there in this area between Redfern and Waterloo and there were some great characters up there.

SR: Who were some of the people around there at Irishtown?

CN: Well, one of the ones that come to light with was a chap by the name of Barney Fallon[?] who ran the Zetland Hotel - he was one of my father's best mates. He went into that pub from the proceeds of what we used to call the Sixpenny Double. He had no money to pay staff and my mother and father used to go over there and pull beer for them till somebody rang the railway up and told that my father had a second job and that was true. They got nothing; it was just something they had to do. But his mother was a character because being Irish one of their real facilities was to have a wake if somebody died. And what happened, Mrs Fallon had the job of laying them out and, of course, at a wake if you've never been to one, the Irish people have the coffin in one room and the corpse'd be in his best pyjamas and his hair'd all be and he would be getting ready for one for the road.

- 12.06 And they used to have a dish of salt on his chest, they'd be drinking all the grog about the place, having pickled onions and dipping in there. And on this particular occasion there was a chap by the name of Martin O'Shaughnessy and he was down in the corner and he was crying "Oh, Paddy, what am I going to do without you? You've been me best mate. We had our punch-ups but we were always good mates" and he kept

drinking and then he started getting melancholy and he says "How's Martin going to get across the River Jordan?" and he said "I know" and it was in the area of the Depression. He got out ten shillings and put it up in his pyjama pocket up here which was a tremendous amount of money in those days. But Mrs Fallon – times were tough – Mrs Fallon seen where he put it so at the appropriate time she took the ten shilling note out and put a note in "I'll pay you when I get there. Mary Fallon". So you've got all these sort of situations. They're supposed to be stupid, Irish, but this was part of the layby system.

SR: And were you there at that occasion?

CN: No, my dad was in that there sort of thing.

SR: And he told you these stories?

CN: He told me about all these sort of thing. The same as when the transport come here, we had what they call a famous line[?] called the Bow Bells in which there was horse-drawn buses. Now, he had a place around here and you could go from Alexandria to Wynyard for tuppence and that went for years; it was very successful. And just up there in Mitchell Road now there's still the stables. They had eighty four horses up there and when the trams come into the area and pushed them out, well, they were very upset, naturally. So what they used to do, when they found the timetables of the bus they used to go 'round with the horse-drawn buses and pick up the people before the trams could get them which caused all sorts of difficulties.

14.03

And my father told me that he played football in the area and he went over to Balmain in these double-decker horse-drawn buses and if they happened to beat Balmain he said they were always sent off with a cascade of stones; they chased the buses and pelted them with stones. And so all these sort of things have a very, very big impact on you.

SR: Yes. You know before when we were talking about the Chinese?

CN: Yes.

SR: Did you know the names of any of those Chinese?

CN: No, I don't know any but there would be some people who would probably know them. They used to have only a handful of people who control all of them; they bought the market gardens and had these fellas working for them. One name comes to mind. A fella by the name of Vic La Sui [?], he was one of them. He was quite a good man too.

SR: And the owners of these market gardens were they Chinese?

CN: Oh, yes, yes. The same as over here, the things now. I tell you, you talk about industrial matters, my first job – and this was way back in 1934 – they applied for an apprentice for the boot trade down here on the corner. So I went down and there were sixty other kids there, all after one job. Fortunately for me, the local plumber was doing some work there, asked me what I was doing. I told him I was applying for the job. So he went inside, seen the proprietor and they come out and they picked me. Well, it was great. The only problem was I was done up in my best, I had a two and sixpenny pair of patent leather shoes that had cardboard soles on them and everywhere that I walked in the place the tacks were going through these cardboard soles and I was jumping all over the place. And, of course, being new and being Catholic I never knew much about language and they were using filthy language all the time. I used to put my hands over my ears so I wouldn't hear it and then, of course, it got to the stage where I said one day "If my mother was down here she'd wash your mouth out with soapy water".

16.09 Well, you can imagine what they did to me after that and then they started calling the Pope all sorts of names and I wanted to fight everybody. I couldn't beat I was never any good fighting.

SR: How old were you then?

CN: I was fourteen. And this is all the sort of things that happened. Now you talk about like industrial now. This was a disgraceful sort of thing because down here we had a lot of people coming from the other suburbs, Bankstown, Canterbury; that come down here. Now, all the seniors got sacked at Christmas for twelve months and had to reapply for their job and then during the day if there were no orders they'd have to come down and then they'd be sent home half a day. And when you're young you get enthusiastic and I learned to work four machines so I found out what they were doing: they were sending these people home and putting me on them. I wasn't as fast as what they were but I could do the job adequately. And so I realised what he was doing so I used to say to them "Take a part out of the machine" because all the machines in those days were on lease from what they called the British United Machinery Company and they'd come out and after a couple of times the mechanic would say "Where is it?" I said "What are you talking about?" "Where's the part you took out?" He knew what was going on. But it was a very, very difficult period.

SR: Was that to slow it down?

CN: Couldn't operate the machine with a part out. You see, it was all that sort of thing. And the shoes you get today are not what we used to make. They were what they called Welsh shoes; you'd do the whole box and dice. They'd be stitched on soles, not these stuck-on things they have today.

SR: And when the people were sent home they would be sent home without pay?

CN: Of course. If they worked an hour they'd get paid for the hour but the rest, they wouldn't get paid for that.

SR: That's about 1932 this was, was it?

18.01 CN: This was 'round about 1934 was when I started to work there.

SR: Right. Was it unionised then, was there a union?

CN: Oh, yes, there was a union but it was always smart. You see, they get the unions down. Before the unions would come down they would make arrangements for them to come down. Either they'd ring the union or the union would call and all the apprentices would have to go and do all the things that had to be done. They'd take them downstairs, give them a couple of grogs or something, then they'll come up and everything was O.K. So there was never any real problem there but that's what happened with me was the fact that I found what was happening so I had an argument with the boss which was very stupid because the fact of the matter was that he come up and he started to stand over me but we had an old fella there that grew up with him and they used to have a boy assisting me. He took the boy away to sit down and talk to him or give him a couple of boiled lollies and I went down and got him and had an argument with him and I called him and ignorant old B. So he went down and seen his mate, the boss, and he come up to me and he wouldn't listen to me so I called him an ignorant old B and as a consequence I was a radical – this is what I was supposed to be – and when I turned twenty one they made sure they got rid of me, despite the fact they kept people on who weren't as proficient as I was at that time and I left and I got a job on the railway. And I was only on the railway a fortnight and this was during the war period and they got a very big order for making the air force shoes and they come up and asked me to go back but I wasn't going back because the railway's infinitely better.

SR: And what was the name of that company, the shoe company?

CN: McEwan's Manufacturing. They were the original makers of the Dally M football boots and the Don Bradman cricket shoes. But, see, all

around here – now that park over there now was a great big beautiful park with great big Morton Bay fig trees.

20.06

The other side of the park was a company called Metter's that had two thousand people working there. They used to run a special bus with a little loop line around there, that's how big it was and, of course, with the evolution of time and the new procedures that finished up going down the park. But over here the park was owned by a trust - there weren't these flats, they only come later – and that used to be looked after by a chap by the name of McCarthy [?] and he had beautiful gardens and if you kick up there and he caught you mucking about he wasn't short in giving you a whack across the ear or a boot up the backside. And we had one fella up here about four doors up by the name of Whitty [?]; if he caught you over there he would do the same sort of thing to you. And Mr Whitty will always be remembered to me anyhow because he's the only fella that I ever seen – he had a monkey on a chain that used to run up the tree and if you tried to get into that place the monkey would bare his teeth and come chase. It was better than any dog and this is the whole thing with him. In addition to those sort of things he had a son – well he had a number of kids – but this particular fella was what my said he was over the park, eating plum puddings. They were little tiny little beetles you got only in this little bush and he was taken down to bowl at the nets and he bowled himself into an Australian cricket team and finished up a big grazier in Mount Gambier in South Australia.

SR: Is that one of his sons?

CN: That was one of his sons, yes.

SR: Really?

CN: And then, of course, further up the street because as I tell you about Irish we had the best Irish jig dancer in the whole of Australia, not New South Wales, by the name of Jackie Minns [?]. You couldn't imagine the amount of gold medals that he won and they all used to be on a great big piece of velvet; it was unbelievable.

22.05

We had a very famous journalist up the top of the street by the name of Thatcher. They'd call him "Feet Thatcher" because his feet was that big and he used to write for a paper known as the *Labor Daily*. And we always had good footballers around here and to ensure that one of the local fellas never got off the press - his name was Eddie Root – he kept right in through the football season, through the cricket season and he ultimately become an international footballer but he was a very good player. We've had a lot of things around here. We've had famous and

infamous people. You've probably heard about the Joshua Smith [artist] Dobell Prize [Archibald Prize] winning thing. Joshua Smith lived around in Raglan Street and then on the other side, the infamous part, was that Darcy Dugan. Darcy Dugan's father used to run a little greengrocer shop down in Henderson Road.

SR: And did you know Darcy?

CN: Only vaguely – you knew of him. You see, we were rather protected. You see, we never, ever got out in terms of mix because they used to make sure who your company was and what you were doing - see, it was very easy. In the real Depression my two brothers – I was still going to school, really – and they were out of work, one for six years and one for four years and my dad used to always be so proud of them and it used to upset me because he was saying how good they were because it was so easy to get into trouble. Economic circumstances forced issues that they couldn't do to eat and that was the whole thing with it. See, one of the things that you'll probably laugh, the Alexandria Town Hall has a tremendous history which people don't really know. At one stage, the first town hall at Alexandria was built in Henderson Road which was called North Raglan Street.

24.07

There was West Raglan Street and North Raglan Street and what happened there, a chap, you see, a street 'round here by the name of Shelly [?] built the first town hall for sixty six pound. He'd applied to get a piece of land but the information that happened there was they weren't to spend more than two and sixpence per week to lease the piece of ground. Now, the thing all started – see, there was no local government in New South Wales till 1842 and that because what they call the Sydney Corporation Act and they dispersed all local government services in and around the area. But within the act there was a clause there that said if there were sufficient people that wanted to get a municipality and there were sufficient numbers they could apply to the governor and he would grant them a municipality and this is what happened. First Redfern, then Redfern dispersed the local government things at Redfern, Waterloo and Alexandria because we're only known as the west ward of Waterloo, we weren't Alexandria. And then when we finally wanted to get a municipality Waterloo, they objected and they went to court because we were taking away more than half their ground and three quarters of their revenue and when it come to an election they wouldn't give us the rolls and so they again had problems and all of these sort of things that happened.

SR: You know how you mentioned before Joshua Smith?

CN: Yes.

SR: Did you know him?

CN: No, I only knew of him because he was around there in that time - I had an auntie that lived opposite him.

SR: Now, going back to your childhood, what are your earliest memories? So you were born in 1918.

CN: '18, yes.

SR: So you could remember the mid-1920s?

CN: 1920s.

SR: And what are your earliest memories?

CN: Well, the thing was it seemed to be because of the particular people being mostly of Irish extracts and one thing and another you always had an affinity; you played with each other.

26.07

There would be situations where every one of us participated in sport and that are why I was never very good at school: I only wanted to play sport. You could play any of the three grades of football, rugby league, soccer, Australian Rules and everybody would play cricket. One street would play another street and sometimes if the team that won batted in the morning wouldn't turn up in the afternoon so you'd have a punch-up. Now, we never had any money. Over this park over here the only money that we ever got as children was to get up in the early hours of the morning, go over to the park, chasing empty beer bottles for which we got a ha'penny [halfpenny] but if there was only one beer bottle and two kids got there, whoever could fight the best got the bottle.

SR: And what's the name of that park there?

CN: That's Erskineville Park. It was run by a trust but that oval wasn't always there. The other oval was right down on the other side of Ashmore Street.

SR: And so how old were you when you started playing?

CN: Doing these sort of things? I reckon from around about seven onwards you went there, see, and all these sort of things all become a part of your life. Like everybody would, every Sunday we'd come down here to Grandma Noble and have a baked dinner; that was all part of the system. Then the other sort of thing was we were never hungry. I wasn't but there were a lot of people were in these areas and that's

where this community spirit became so good with each other and helping all the time. My wife's mother, every time that they had a baked meal she'd cut off a meal to take down the street to a person who very rarely got a real good meal and so all these things happened.

SR: And did your father stay in work during the Depression and the '20s?

CN: Yes. As I say, he was a plumber on the railway and we were never hungry. The only thing that he ever suffered during the Depression period was they used to lose one week in nine and other people lost a lot more than that.

28.12 **SR: And earlier on you mentioned that he got elected – was that to the state parliament?**

CN: Yes. An interesting sort of situation because when McKell got the Governor-General's job - - -

SR: What year are we talking about here?

CN: Now, that would be he was there – he died in 1949 – that'd be 'round about '45, 1945. You see, my father, as I said, was his right hand man down here. Everything around here, "Go and see Harry Noble" and he'd go and see McKell and McKell'd do what he wanted sort of thing, what he could - he couldn't always be successful. And the most interesting thing that come about was there were some rather dubious sort of people in a lot of people's minds who wanted to McKell to do something and he didn't do it so they run a candidate against him.

SR: And what was it that they wanted him to do?

CN: It was one of their friends was in jail and they wanted to get him into a prison farm which was a lot easier for him and McKell did nothing. So what they did, they got one of the local Irishmen, dressed him up, put a new suit on him, took him up to church every Sunday morning, parade him in the people and he cut McKell's margin nearly in half so McKell panicked and he rang my father and he said "Can you see them?" and they said yes. So he went and seen them and then McKell said he couldn't remember. Anyway, he did what they wanted and, of course, they come on side and when McKell went most of these people – as I say, my father worked for him so long he didn't want to leave the railway.

30.03 I said "But, dad, you've been doing the work for thirty years. Why wouldn't you want to do it? It will give you a lift in your salary and your status" and that. He wasn't interested in status but he got in at a very,

very difficult time because it was during that period when they were knocking down all the houses and that Clive Evatt, he promised them that anybody that left would get back first off and then when they knocked the houses down and got rid of them out to Herne Bay and all those sort of places they changed their mind to this extent: you couldn't come back to those flats if you had a child under the age of nine. Well, this really upset everybody. Well, we talked it over. Any rate, my father went at the last – you know, he resisted it right through and it was an interesting sort of thing because in the preselection ballot - you only had to win the preselection ballot and you were in – he only was about a fortnight before and when the preselection ballot was taken the returning officer for some inexplicable reason says that in the event of a dead heat - - - [break in recording]

SR: Sorry, I've forgotten what we were talking about.

CN: Yes, we were talking about the fact that my father and this Fred Green [Labor politician] run a dead heat in that sort of preselection ballot but my father was too fair dinkum.

SR: Did he lose then, did he?

CN: No, he didn't lose, he died, because he died after two and a half years. He was too fair dinkum because the things that he wasn't successful with him used to worry him. He could be ninety eight per cent but the two things that didn't – and in politics you always get the most difficult jobs from your so-called friends and if you aren't successful they say you aren't trying.

32.02

And, of course, what was happening with all these people, I remember one piece up the back here, it was a two-storey place and one person was in it and the owner wanted to get them out because their daughter was getting married. So they were both friends of my father and they come 'round here. He was the local politician and they wanted, one to get him out and one to stop them getting them out so he suggested "Have you ever thought because it's a two-storey place you might divide it into two flats?" so he finished up satisfying both people and this is what happened with him.

SR: So he won that preselection?

CN: He won the preselection and he was only there for two and a half years and he died.

SR: Did he have a heart attack?

CN: Well, it must have been because I like to have a punt and I was at work and he rang me at work. He said "I'll ring you in the morning", he said, "and I think I've got a good thing for you" and they pulled me out of bed the next morning at four o'clock to tell me he was dead. He was playing cards with his friends and he got some sort of attack and he even walked from the car into the casualty. When they come out five minutes later he was dead. And he would have had to have been there because both sides of Newtown – the cars, there must have been a hundred and fifty cars; he was very popular, good man.

SR: And how old was he then?

CN: Fifty six.

SR: That's terrible.

CN: Shocking, yes.

SR: Going back to when you were a child, your father was a plumber.

CN: Yes.

SR: And what sort of family did your mother come from?

CN: Just an ordinary background family. She originally come from Tasmania and her father was a wharf labourer and that's with the irony of people tell you not to drink. He never had a drink or a smoke in his life and he died in his early fifties. Grandfather Noble never had a stinking old pipe out of his mouth and lived till he was eighty two, just went to bed and passed away. It was an interesting situation with my grandfather because he come from England in a place called Halifax and I believe it's the Black Hole of Calcutta.

34.04 When I was over there I made an inquiry. They said "Don't go up there" and he was an engineer. As a matter of fact - there was something in the boats there in the paper the other day – he was an engineer on that Greycliffe [ferry on Sydney Harbour] but not when the accident happened, prior to that. And he was a strange little bloke. I don't know how many fights I had with him because he had a little bowler hat and he'd never got out of here without a tie and the kids used to sling off at him. They couldn't do that to my grandfather and so - - -

SR: What'd they say to him?

CN: They used to sing out "Adger, badger, where'd you get that silly old bowler hat?" and, of course, he never, ever swore - the worst words he ever said was "blasted". And when he come out here he finally was an engineer on a boat going up the rivers and he was up at Macleay River

and that's where my grandmother come from and he was an excellent pianist and he used to be very popular to go 'round and play for the people and so that's the way that went from there and my father was an only child.

SR: And when did the family, the Noble family, settle in Copeland Street?

CN: 1908.

SR: And so you've got all these stories from your father and your grandfather?

CN: Most of them, most of them but, you see, the background and the history of this, because I was at a meeting 'round here – you may or may not know they've got a welfare centre 'round here named after me – and over the road you see my father's got a reserve, the Cliff Noble Activity Centre and it was that sort of a situation with it. And I've been lucky because with very limited ability – you see, when I got the run of the northern that was an interesting sort of situation because in Labor politics it's a pretty diabolical game, you've got to know how to fight and I didn't know how to fight initially. And they were having troubles because some of the people that were working for me, they said they were going to work up the vote, up the ticket; instead of working from the top to the bottom they're going to work up and I was on the bottom of the ticket.

36.13 And I got, you know, the powers that be and they said "Forget about it". Well, the next time it come around I got a position on the ticket where I could win. I was number three or number four – you know, you could win four – and then I went down to the council and I was down there in 1959 was when I first went there. And then the second period around about 1964 I become the Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney and then during that period later on in the year Jensen had an extensive tour overseas and then I got a projection from there and luckily because the projection was that there'd become a vacancy on the Milk Board for a consumers' representative. And I was at work one day and the Minister for Agriculture rang me up and he says "Could you come down to Parliament House?" and I said "Yes". So I thought he wanted to know about the Domain Baths. They were doing some work on the Domain Baths down there and I rang up the council. I wanted all the information so I went down and when I went to Parliament House there's this fella he only had one leg, he's walking down the stairs with his crutch and he said "I've done something without your approval. I hope that you will be happy with it". So I said "What's that,

Mr Minister?" He said "I nominated you as a consumers' representative on the Milk Board. I hope you'll take it". I thought "Well, it's got to be better than being a clerk on the railway" and so I accepted and my salary went from that to that. So he said "Would you like to ring your wife?" so I rang up my wife and she says "Oh, another gratis job, I suppose". I said "No. You can give up work". She said "You're kidding?" and that's how that sort of thing happened and that's how I was lucky.

38.01 Now, there was some great hullabaloo because there was no doubt it was job for the boys and when I accepted it I come home and I started to think. I said "The Chairman of the Milk Board mightn't want me" so I went down and seen him. I said "Well, Mr Ferguson, I don't know whether you know or not but I've been appointed as a consumers' rep on the Milk Board. You mightn't like to work with me" and I said "Have you got any objections?" He said "Well, not really. This might alleviate you" so he bent down, pulled out a drawer and there was his application to the minister to appoint me and that's how it come about. So it was rather an interesting sort of situation. He said "The reason I did it was because I have a great aversion to lots of public servants". He said "My philosophy with public servants is to always have them on tap but never on top" and that's how I become. And I was only down there three months and the government changed from Labor to Liberal and the new minister rang my boss up. I got a phone call here one Sunday, he said "They're going to get rid of you" and he said "You'd better come in early in the morning". So I went in and he said "They're trying to get rid of you because you're only supposed to have the unexpired term of a predecessor" which was three months. And he said "That's not true. You've got an appointment. It's in the *Government Gazette* for seven years so if they've got to put you out they've got to pay you thirty five thousand pound". I said "That's all the money in the world" so they didn't do it but I knew I couldn't get in the superannuation fund so I went and took out my own superannuation and then when I get near the end of me term – the term was for seven years and it was a terrific sort of thing – so near the term I thought "Well, I'm gone this time", you know, the new government they're changed over.

40.04 And I'm at the races one day and Bob Askin [NSW Premier] says to me "Cliff, can I see you?" I says "Yes, Mr Premier". He said "I thought you'd like to know I've signed another agreement for another seven year term for you" so obviously I done something right.

SR: That's surprising, isn't it?

CN: Well, it was surprising. It was surprising because while people cast aspersions on Askin not to me because it was a tremendous thing but that's the way that it went.

SR: O.K. Well, let's go back to the 1920s.

CN: Yes.

SR: Who were your friends?

CN: Well, everybody in the district within about three streets 'round here. You see, we never had any what you'd call "enemies" and that sort of thing because we played together in those days. You'd have all sorts of games. You'd have what we call releasing. We'd pick sides and some would scatter everywhere and you'd give them a five minute start and then you'd chase after them and grab them and bring them back and put them in a circle and then so the other kids'd come out and release them - if you weren't there they'd get out. And then, of course, you'd play the game called Cocky Laura. Cocky Laura was a situation where you again pick sides and it would have one fella who'd be the anchor man up against the wall and you'd have about six to eight kids all with their heads tucked down and you'd go down the back and you'd have to jump on them and if they collapse down underneath your weight they'd be a weakie and so this is the sort of thing that went on. And, of course, again we played marbles and we played tops. And tops you had circle and you had to spin a top and if it didn't spin your top had to go in the middle and some could do it and win them and, of course, you'd be very upset. And then we had another sort of a very silly game called Timpani [?]. Timpani was you'd get a piece of stick and you sharpen both ends of the stick and then you have another stick and you'd hit it and when it'd go up in the air you'd whack it and you'd be doing this all 'round the streets. There was nothing to it at all but it was just something to occupy yourself.

42.18 **SR: What did you do with it?**

CN: Just a little piece of stick and its pointed end and you'd hit it and when it'd go up in the air you'd whack it with this thing and then you'd chase it up and keep chasing it all the way along the line. We used to race what we called boats in the gutter when it rained. There'd always be a stream of thing coming around and you'd get a little piece of stick and we'd race boats down to the gutters. And that's one thing again which I should tell you about. A most interesting thing was in 1892 there was a tremendous depression around here and the council was operative then and from all these streams – I was telling you about the water going down to Shea's Creek – they got the unemployed to build what

they call canals. Now, that took all the stormwater around here. A lot of kids got drowned and that, you know, in all sorts of trouble and then as time progressed they used to race boats down there and they'd bet on them and depending on the volume of the water and the width of the stream you'd have either six or eight boats and they'd get all various prices of them and people had their pennies and thruppences [threepences] on them, whatever it might be.

SR: Adults and kids?

CN: Oh, mostly adults, not the kids. The kids come into it later for the simple reason - on the side there'd be a lot of green moss and that sort of thing and the bookmakers used to say to the kids "If the favourite's in front if you fall in the stream there's thruppence in it for you" So you'd fall in the stream and the boat that was leading would get washed on the side and they would lose their money and, of course, we'd get the thruppence and away you'd go because thruppence was a fortune.

44.05 And, of course, what happened there was the granddaddy of all fights at that particular time because the people from Newtown used to run it and the people from Alexandria weren't very impressed with that so there's only one way they could get charge of it and so there was a big punch-up. And then they'd play two-up and all that sort of thing over there.

SR: So there was a punch-up between the people from Alexandria - - -

CN: And the blokes from Newtown. Oh, yes, that was on.

SR: Did you see that?

CN: Oh, yes, I've seen it several times and a grandstand view because there was a big water pipe went right across - we used to sit up there and watch it. We would never get involved because we're too young. The only thing that we ever got was when we fell in the stream was a big kick up the pants or a whack across the ear from the people that had the boats that went up on the side.

SR: Can you name some of the people that were involved in that? Do you know the names of the local characters?

CN: No, I wouldn't know them now, no, because it's a long time, it's a hell of a long time ago.

SR: What about the names of the kids that you used to do the boat races with and play with? What were the names of some of your mates?

CN: Well, as I say, there was this Jackie Minns who I always felt sorry for him because he used to have to go to school and he was that good he used to have to teach Irish dancing and his mother was a bit of a tyrant with him or we thought she was. And then there was a chap at the back by the name of Crane who one time was the Deputy Town Clerk of Alexandria Council when he grew up and this Billy Timms [?] was a nephew of the Whittys [?] - he become a draughtsman. And we were always pretty good, good friends, that sort of thing but I lot of people we wouldn't do because, see, years ago unless you were prepared to do some silly things like break windows or break – they used to have the glasses for the lights in the street. Kids used to get a fiendish delight out of doing that.

46.06 And, of course, in the real bad times of the Depression they only ever used gas around here and you had gas meters and you had a penny in the slot or a shilling in the slot and if people seen that people are going out and they thought there was an opportunity they'd get a tin opener and they would open up the things and they would knock the money off.

SR: So in the area there was a bit of petty crime?

CN: But economic circumstance. They didn't call it crime because I believe that circumstances force people to do things that they normally wouldn't do. It's just like policies. I used to be in a position when I was on the Milk Board – we used to be part of making up policy. Now, policies are made at particular times to meet a need at that time and you shouldn't be stuck with them forever. Now, I firmly believe that if you're going to make a policy that's going to interfere with the lives and the livelihoods of people you should go and tell them the reasons for it. Now, we used to do that by going out to the farmers and it was very difficult to please farmers because unless you gave them what they want you were always wrong; we never done anything for them, we only done things to them. But I adopted an attitude with them that sometimes the sourest medicine effects the greatest cure so you tell them the nasty things. They want to kill you and all that sort of thing but then later on they realise that what you're trying to do is for their advantage and that's the whole thing with them. Now, what I used to do as a consumers' representative, I had three million bosses in New South Wales. I'd been called every kind of illegitimate there ever was because I wouldn't always agree with what they wanted to do and, of course, everybody likes to hear things pleasing to their ears. Now, I used to tell them if I was talking to a group of farmers, I said "Look, I can stand up here tonight and I can tell you all the things that you want to hear but they won't be truthful. In a month's time you'll realise what a villain I was because you'll suffer the consequences.

48.22 **SR: What I wanted to ask, you know we were talking about the kids in the neighbourhood and the people that you knew.**

CN: Yes.

SR: Earlier, much earlier, you mentioned the McMahons who had the stables. Now, did you know Billy McMahon [later Prime Minister of Australia]?

CN: No, no. He was on the opposite side. We only knew of him as a Treasurer and he was a very good Treasurer too despite what people think because he was the subject of a lot of ridicule because of his appearance and one thing and another but that, I don't think, affected his ability to do the job properly.

SR: Did you know him as a kid?

CN: No, no. He didn't live around here. Only Buddy McMahon, his uncle, was I believe up there at whatsaname.

SR: And did you know him?

CN: No, he was a much older vintage than me but why I knew about him because I went to the Brothers school up there at Redfern and his stables were just opposite where we were.

SR: What was the name of that school you went to?

CN: The Patrician Brothers Redfern.

SR: And tell me about that school.

CN: Well, it was an interesting thing. I started up here at the convent up here in Erskineville Road there.

SR: What's it called?

CN: St Mary's Erskineville. So I went there and I can remember my first day when I went there, very resplendent, and I can always remember Sister Augusta saying "Was your brother named Phillip Noble?" and I very proudly said "Yes". She said "He was a monster" and she never, ever got off my back. In those days the nuns used to have a great strap around them and she wasn't averse to using it so she made my life rather difficult.

50.00 And I can always remember I was appalled. I was having difficulties doing long divisions of money and they got a lay teacher come along that spent more time than she should have with me but she taught me what to do and I did it and very proudly she gave me some exercises to

do and I took them over and she looked at it and she threw it at me. I said "What's the matter?" She says "You haven't put the pounds, shilling and pence on top of them". And so I answered the door one day and the brother said to me, he come down, he said "How about coming up to the Patrician Brothers at Redfern?" I said "No, I'm happy up here" because to me the nuns were the quintessence of everything that was good. I still practice my faith and I believe in it and I reckon they were the ones who really started me off. So he said "Why won't you come? Can you play football?" Soon as he said that I was gone. I said "Yes, I can play football" and away we went up there. Now, we used to scale the trams and then we used to walk most of the time. But they made a impact on it because only as late as last Saturday night I went to a reunion at Holy Cross College Ryde where they had the inner city boys there because there were three schools. There was Redfern, Waterloo – and they called it Mount Carmel – and Forest Lodge. Well, most of the boys they all come down to start at Redfern. They used to come from the western suburbs all down here and then go there and, of course, it's all closed now, that part of it. And, of course, football, this was it, and I took them some photos over and showed them the photos. Sixty years ago we were virtually unbeaten. We used to beat the public schools and one of my greatest joys was playing on the cricket ground before the English people and I got a number on me back. I was made because I was big time with this number on me back and so it went on. And from that time there were seven of us that played in that football team who all played first grade football.

52.03 **SR: For what team?**

CN: I played with Newtown. I had one season with Souths [South Sydney], not very good but I was at Newtown and I can always remember my swan song as a footballer. It was during the war and those Austerity Saturdays there was about forty thousand people out there and I'm walking off the ground with a compound fracture on this jaw, a broken on this side and a bloke screamed out "What's the matter with you, Noble, you mug?" And so this is what went on but they were good times and good football and that sort of thing.

SR: And you know the Patrician Brothers School?

CN: Yes.

SR: What was it like going to school there?

CN: It was good. It was a bit hard. I'm not very partial to this non-corporal punishment in schools today because again the economic

circumstance of our school a lot of kids done a lot of things that they shouldn't do. I remember on one occasion I'm sitting in a class there and in come a policeman and he said "I want you" and I said "Me?" and he said "No, that bloke sitting alongside you". He'd been down – and those days the toilet cisterns used to have a great lead outlet. You'd have the bowl up the top and you'd pull the chain and the water'd come down and again this sort of lead outlet and he was pinching the lead and selling it and I nearly died; I thought it was me he was talking to. But they were all sorts of people. And one fella that went to our school, his name was Penrose and he was the greatest villain of all time and ultimately got shot. He was only at the school half the year and he was the best student in the class. In our Intermediate he got six As without any trouble at all - everybody was battling along. He was allegedly – I don't know, this is allegedly - the only fella that ever broke into Orchard's, the jeweller's in the city, and he was coming home and a policeman up there – the trams used to run along Redfern Street – and the policeman must have identified him and he finished up he shot the policeman and they finished up shooting him.

54.18 And a brother told me - he was allegedly, according to the police he shot himself – he said "Well, he must have been good. He had about four bullets in him".

SR: Really?

CN: But, see, there was a mixture of both but I subscribe to the fact that there are a lot more good people than the ones who aren't so good so I don't worry about the ones who aren't so good and concentrate my efforts on the people who deserve to be looked after.

SR: And were you a wild kid?

CN: Not particularly, because I was lucky I had two brothers there to protect me if I got into any trouble but I don't think that I was wild because I was always fearful. On one occasion I remember my auntie who lived up at Redfern took me down to the markets and she wanted two shillings worth of oranges and while I'm there the biggest orange you've ever seen was in the front and when the bloke turned his back I picked it up and put it under me jumper and I'm walking away. He said "Hey". I pelted it back at him. He said "I'll only give you a shilling's worth of oranges instead of two". When I got back to me auntie I was deathly white and she said "What's the matter? You sick?" I says "Sick for fear" and that's what went on. So there's a couple of things I learnt in life that, you know, stealing's no good and I've never had a draw of a cigarette in my life and I've never had a drink in my life despite the fact I

played football and I was always popular because I could drive them home sort of thing and I got more abuse from barmaids because I wouldn't have a man's drink and all that sort of silly business. But the smoking bit, they used to have a factory down here in Newton Street called Manly Ferrari and they used to make cane perambulators and they used to have little offcuts of cane which they threw over into the paddock.

56.12 And us boys – I was about nine, I think – we went down to have a big smoke of this. The first two kids that lit up, one went green and got very sick and the other bloke, got very sick and me being a coward I said “Not bloody likely”. I never had a draw of a cigarette since.

SR: Were they smoking the cane?

CN: Smoking the cane because they used to smoke anything.

SR: Gee.

CN: Tealeaves and all, those kids, and that sort of thing. But it just never appealed to me. It's the most stupid exercise I've ever seen in my life, smoking.

SR: What did kids do in the Depression? Well, did you in the Depression sort of have to do things to help supplement the family's income?

CN: No, I didn't but we used to all have little jobs like taking the orders from the butcher 'round to people and that sort of thing – you'd get sixpence. My mainstay of sixpence a week was my grandmother who was very sick for years and I can always remember in that front room she had all holes in her legs. She had dropsy and they used to drill little holes in her – all used to be weeping all the time. So I used to get sixpence a week for running her messages which was big-time; you can get in the pictures. But it was just something that you took for granted and the basic thing is you were never jealous of anybody because you were all in the same boat.

SR: And did you go to the pictures – what did you do with the sixpence?

CN: Oh, yes. Of the sixpence you'd pay thruppence in and then you'd have thruppence worth of lollies and lots of times you'd have the things, the little round balls that you let them run down there And, of course, the pictures in those days they used to have a person playing

the piano all the time, the very dramatic scenes that all this crescendo would get up and so it went on.

58.05 **SR: Was it silent movies, was it?**

CN: Most of the time, yes. Of course when the talkies come in – they come in ‘round about 1928/29 – that was fantastic then. The same with the wireless. We used to have what they call a crystal set and you used to have these little ears and, of course, we only had one set of earphones and, of course, three boys all tried to get a go at these sort of things; there was pushing and shoving and all that sort of business. But, no, I would say I've been terribly lucky in my life. Let me tell you this. As I say, with very little ability I've had two trips around the world. One I took a delegation from the City Council around the world, the second I went to an international milk conference over in Austria and these are the sort of things and while they're good to see it's lovely to be home. But I've learnt in life that if you want to get something, you've got to impose something on people, you've got to do it by going and fronting up and explaining to them because whether we admit it or not we're all creatures of habit and unless you explain it to them you have a corollary of four things: fear, suspicion, prejudice and rejection and that's how they come in all this order. So it mightn't be as nice as what you want but you've got to be prepared to do those sort of things. It was very, you keep When I got the job there was quite a hullabaloo because top public servants wanted the job and my boss didn't want public servants. People in the Labor Party weren't very happy. I remember the secretary of the Labor Party saying to me "That's the best bloody kept secret". I said "It was a secret from me because I never had a clue what it was all about" and they get very, very jealous about these sort of things.

60.00 And when I got the job there was quite a hullabaloo in the paper about the fact that, you know, "jobs for the boys" and someone was maligning me: "What does he know about production and distribution of milk?" And poor old Rex Jackson[Labor MP] who's had all sorts of trouble, Rex got up. He said "He knows all about the stuff. He drinks the bloody stuff, that's how he knows all about it" and so it went on. And these are the sort of things that happen with you.

SR: This is just going back, bringing you back. You know how you talked about was it the Syrian area?

CN: Yes.

SR: Where was that? We didn't say where that was.

CN: That was on the other side of Redfern Oval. You know down there I think there's what they call – there's Chalmers Street and there's Elizabeth Street, right down the back there – probably be what they call Elizabeth Street. And we used to go down there and cause all sorts of mayhem by ridiculing them and sometimes they'd pull out a big knife and when you seen the knife you were whamming away, you went for your life.

SR: And what did you say to them?

CN: We used to sing "What are you wearing a dress for?" because we couldn't understand all the sort of things that went on. And it was very interesting too because I remember when I was the alderman the alderman from Redfern constituency got ill and I said "Well, look, I'll do your interviews for you" and I went up and I sent myself up there and a fella come in one night and he says "I believe that you've opposed the granting of an application for me to set up a factory". I said "That's right". He said "Why?" I said "Well, I think there's sufficient factories in the area, there's getting all this rag trade" because all those Syrians and that were all rag trade business. He said "Well, I made this application at the request of the alderman who should be here tonight". I said "Well, I didn't know that" so I went and seen him. So I then said, got to talk, I said "You go back and appeal against the decision and then I will get up and speak for you".

62.08

And then lo and behold he pops up and he said "I went to school with you". I said "Well, I don't ever remember you" because he was like younger than I was and we got very good friends. And it was an interesting exercise because in that time Nick Shehadie was around, Sir Nicholas [later Lord Mayor of Sydney], and in the Lebanese community - - - [break in recording]

SR: Interview with Cliff Noble, 3rd of November 1994. What were we talking - - -

CN: Yes, about the election. When these Lebanese had met and they said they were going to support Shehadie and this friend said to me, he said "No, we're not. We're supporting Noble". They said "All right. We'll support Noble 1 and Shehadie 2" and that's how I never had any trouble at all getting back into the sort of thing. But it's interesting. People are very critical of local government but they do more to develop areas than anyone and particularly this area around here. It was unbelievable because, you see, one of the things, when they started in 1868 when they had now, they had people who had never had a clue what they had to do. Roads up here, the main roads,

were just sand tracks and impassable in the wet weather, dustbowls in the dry weather and so they had to get themselves all re-educated about what had to be done. Now, there was a toll road up here in Mitchell Road, there was a toll road in Botany Road and there was a toll road in Henderson Road. Henderson Road is a very interesting thing. And most of those aldermen, one of them had thirty four and a half years' service in the council, as much as twenty five years, fifteen years and so it went on.

64.07 And right opposite Alexandria School where there's a local pub there now called the Balaclava, that was known as Jesson Village because all the huts around here were just slab huts and this Mr Jesson created what they called Jesson Village and he was the first man to introduce good houses for the people in the area. His home was like a castle with a British flag floating on the top and everything else.

SR: When was that that you're talking about?

CN: This is way back in the 1860s onwards, you know, 'round about 1880 and that sort of thing.

SR: And how do you know about this – have you been studying?

CN: Well, I done some research and, as I say, this Rotary Club they wanted me to talk to them only for the reason, the fact, that I'm probably one of oldest people living in the area and lived the longest here and I saw it as a challenge so I started to delve into it. And I thought to myself, "Well, this is unbelievable" and the more I thought about it the more interested I become because it really conveyed man's inhumanity to man. Now, history is made by incidents or achievements. Now, I was reading recently, like when Cook come out here in the 1770s – and which upsets me now – he stuck a flag in the ground over there at Kurnell and that was a symbol that stood there for eighteen years to indicate that this was a British position and he only beat La Perouse, Captain La Perouse, a Frenchman by a fortnight, otherwise a fortnight we would've been French. So when Phillip come out here and when he's made this awful statement about desolation he's only there a couple of days and he come down through and got into the heads [of Sydney Harbour] and the whole perspective changed.

66.01 So when they first come out here it was Banks who seen the potential for Australia and what the incident that created and advanced our population or inhabitation by fifty years was when the Americans threw the tea in the Boston Harbour they had to find places to put them and [Sir Joseph] Banks come up and said "Australia". But do you know what they did with those poor people that come out to be our?

They were loaded on ships in January and were down in the holds of the ship from January to May, never got to see the sunlight and air and this is what goes on.

SR: O.K, that's good. I mean you've done quite a lot of work, haven't you?

CN: Yes, because it becomes very interesting.

SR: Yes. I wanted to get back to Nick Shehadie. Did you know him as a kid?

CN: No. Well, Nick Shehadie was the son of an Archbishop of the Greek Church up in Redfern and his father was a great friend of McKell who was a local member up there and I remember having arguments with him – well, not arguments - he was a great big giant. I said “You've got to learn to fight. You're too easy. You can't have these blokes having a go at you and you want to do the nice thing”.

SR: Who's this, Nick?

CN: I said to Nick because I liked him and his wife was a doctor, Marie [Bashir, later governor of New South Wales], a very nice person. And he did learn to fight and so it went on but I said “Your father'd be turning in his grave that you're an anti-Labor bloke now because his father was a great supporter of the Labor Party.

SR: O.K. Now, let's get back to the childhood. What sort of a neighbourhood was it here?

CN: Well, it's a very poor neighbourhood as I've told you earlier. Like nobody had anything but that was the whole thing. Now, for instance just to give you an example, if somebody died around here you'd answer a knock at the door. No one could ever afford to buy a wreath.

68.05

They'd come around and collect pennies and ha'pennies [halfpennies] and thruppence [threepence] to buy a wreath just to make sure that they were part of that particular thing. And this is what I say: like if you were sick they'd come down, they'd do the work for the people and away you'd go because you never knew when it was your turn. But it was a poor neighbourhood. Now, as I told you, I was the last of three boys. Everything that I got was hand-me-downs. My little short pants were more patches than what they were pants and then if they were too big the stock answer was “Well, you'll grow into them” and these are the sort of things that happened.

SR: Did your mother work?

CN: No, no, no. That was all taboo in those days.

SR: Can you describe your mother's day at home, what you can remember she did?

CN: Well, first of all she had to get up around about six and she'd prepare the breakfasts so that my father would get his first and he would go off to work and then she'd have to get us up, make sure that you washed yourself and cleaned your teeth and had your breakfast and away you went to school.

SR: Was it a cooked breakfast?

CN: Oh, very rarely, no, very rarely. The evening meal was the only time you ever got a cooked breakfast or a cooked meal. For instance, now everybody has cereals and things. We would have bread and milk. They would chop up clonks of bread and then you'd put warm milk over the top of it. Then you'd have a bit of toast and sometimes you might get an egg, sometimes. And you used treacle in those days or jam on your toast but lots of times you never used butter and treacle or butter and jam, you had one or the other.

SR: What about the evening meal – what was that like?

CN: Well, the evening meal was the usual sort of thing. It would probably be meat and vegetables and probably most of the time would be a custard, like a tapioca custard or a rice custard and so it went on and sometimes you would have fruit salad and stuff like that. The high days and those sort of things was Easter and Christmastime where you'd have chook and pork but the other time was the cheaper cuts of meat.

70.09 **SR: Like lamp chops?**

CN: Oh, yes, or sausages, anything. And I can remember if my mother had been out and come home late she used to prepare a thing called dry ash - people wouldn't know. Dry ash consisted of a buying a bit of cooked corned beef in the thing, mashed potatoes, put it all up, plonk. And then when they wanted to fill you up they would make what they called dumplings. Dumplings was a concoction made out of flour and water with treacle over the top of it and when it hits you and got down in your stomach it'd be there for two days digesting so you were always full.

SR: And you home life, what was that like – how did your parents get on?

CN: Well, they got on reasonably well. I think that they married very young – that was one of the big problems with that sort of thing. And, of course, it's like everything else, familiarity breeds contempt, I think, over a period of time and they done all right up to a point, I guess.

SR: And towards you, would you say that they were warm towards you?

CN: Well, I was in an interesting situation. When my brother was born, my first brother, my grandmother took absolute control of him much to the disgust of my mother. They never, ever got on.

SR: Is that your father's mother took control?

CN: Yes, my father's mother. Then my second brother come along and my mother said "Well, they're not going to do that again" so he become her favourite and so when I come along I got the best of both worlds, I got a bit off both of them. And I can always remember when I lived up the top of the street here one birthday they both bought me a pair of shoes for my birthday and when I took my grandmother's pair up my mother says "Take them back. We don't want them" so I took them back and what did my grandmother say? "Well, if you're going to send them back send the one I bought, not the rubbish she bought" and so it went on, that was that.

72.03

My grandmother was very, very skilful with a needle. She made dresses for all the high people in Sydney and that was where she was then. She was very lucky.

SR: Was she a professional tailor?

CN: A dressmaker, yes. And the people that she made the dresses for she had a very good association, so much so that one of the big people in Sydney who was evidently a professional punter and that sort of thing told her, he said "Mrs Noble, for the next twelve months you put your shillings and your two shillings away because I'm going to give you a horse that'll win the Melbourne Cup" and it did and she always done that for whatsaname. And she had a lot of jewellery – I've got a piece in there – a tiepin that had a great big stem on it. It's made in the form of a shamrock and it's got a diamond in the centre of it; one of the famous jockeys here who went broke she bought all his jewellery. But she was a pretty difficult sort of woman, I would say, particularly from my mother's point of view.

SR: Was her husband alive?

CN: Yes, yes. He outlived her by a good number of years; that was my grandfather, yes. He was very good. As I say, never used a bad word.

SR: And your grandmother, what was her name?

CN: Her maiden name?

SR: No.

CN: Her name was Georgina Noble. We still have a Georgina, one of my brother's children.

SR: And what was her maiden name?

CN: Stanford.

SR: Georgina Stanford.

CN: They come from up the Macleay River.

SR: Right. And where did she have her dressmaking business?

CN: From the home here.

SR: And this is her home?

CN: Yes, this is her home, yes.

SR: And so we're in number 25 Copeland.

CN: 25 and 26 because I am constantly being plagued by real estate agents who want to buy it because, see, we've got usually double the frontage of what the other people is. My grandmother bought this. They lived at Darlington at the time and this area was supposed to going to be the shopping centre of Newtown and that's how she come to buy this here and it just didn't eventuate.

74.13 **SR: And so how far up did you and your parents live - what number did you live at?**

CN: We lived in number 4.

SR: Right.

CN: Yes.

SR: And your parents were both Catholic?

CN: No, my father wasn't and I don't think a better man ever breathed because his philosophy was the woman bears the children, she does the rearing of the children so she should have the say in the religion

and us boys all were brought up as Catholics but my two other brothers, my elder brothers, never continued on their Catholic education like me. I went from the nuns to the Brothers and they went from the nuns to the public school.

SR: And what church did you attend?

CN: Up here, St Mary's Erskineville.

SR: Who was the priest up there?

CN: The greatest character that ever breathed, a fella by the name of Dr Twoomey [?], an absolute mad Irishman. He was one of fourteen and he had two pet aversions, the Masons and abortion and he used to have the big pulpit and he'd get up there and I can still see him. His neck would come up like a frilled lizard and if you happened to be under the pulpit you'd get covered in spittle and he'd bang that thing; he says "The bloody murderers" and he was going on. He was an institution around here, both as a man and a priest; everybody loved him. He used to walk up to and stay in his office every night and all the kids, "Got a penny, Doc?" and he'd throw it – it didn't matter who they were - and he done all the things that you believed in. He was a terrible skite; he used to come over here and do athletics and that sort of thing. And I can remember we were kids, we're doing what they called the Eucharistic Congress over in the old oval and two of the worst villains in the area were kicking a soccer football in amongst us.

76.00

So they come over near. He just got out his knife, ripped up the soccer ball with his knife and went back and threw these things. They were great big mountains, bad men, but he would do that. And then he'd come down, "Go and ask your mother could I take you out for a swim" and we'd all get into a little T-Model Ford and we'd go out. This is the type of man he was: in the First World War they were talking about voting for conscription and up in the pulpit he says "I'm not telling you to vote against conscription but what I am telling you, that anyone votes for it don't come to confession for absolution because you won't get it" and this is the sort of fella that he was. And we used to have a picnic from up at the convent every year over to Clifton Gardens and we're over there and someone went and told him some fella was interfering with the girls. Well, he went down and he gave the bloke a hiding. He dragged him across the area, took him out on the wharf and he says "Now, get the next ferry or I won't be responsible for my actions". He walked back down the jetty about twenty yards and it got the better of him. He went back and picked up the bloke and threw him in the harbour. This is the man that he was and he was that strange. And, of

course, when my brothers went to the public school up there he said from the pulpit one Sunday "Any Catholic kiddie that's not going to the convent will not participate in the races". So, O.K. My eldest brother was evidently fleet of foot and we had a fella over here who was a great footballer with South Sydney named Pat Murphy and he wanted to back my brother to win the race. So he goes up and he says "Hey, Doc, you said that kids not going to Catholic school can't compete in the races". He said "Did I say that, Pat?" and Pat says "Yeah" and he said "And I bloody well meant it too". This was what he was all about. He left here. He fed half the area in the Depression, he was a great man.

SR: What years was he here?

78.01 CN: Well, I'm talking about in my era. That would have been 'round about '24, from there on. See, I'd have been about six or something going up there then. And he was just an absolute marvellous man. He left here and went out to Dulwich Hill so, of course, when he got to Dulwich Hill he wasn't averse to saying what he felt. It was the Christmas period and when I worked on the railway we had a fella by the name of McGee down there who was a very smart economist or whatever they call them. So Doc got up and said "Now, it's Christmastime, it's the season of goodwill and Arthur Furlong has got all the goodwill up there in the corner pub" and, of course, Frank McGee goes around and said "Hey, Doc". "Yes, Frank, what can I do for you?" He said "I wasn't very pleased with your sermon this morning, encouraging people to drink". He said "Frank, you're an economist, aren't you?" He said "Yeah". "Did ever I tell you how to run your business? Don't bloody well tell me how to run mine. Get out" and this was the man that he was.

SR: So he was obviously in the area from well before when you remember.

CN: Yes, that's right, long before.

SR: And right up to – when did he go to Dulwich Hill?

CN: I would say that probably in the late '30s or early '40s went to Dulwich Hill.

SR: I'm just thinking of local sort of authority figures. What about the police – did you know them?

CN: Well, the only time that ever I got into, well, not trouble, I was playing football and someone had walked on me foot and the dye from me sock got in my toes and I got a poisoned toe. And I'm up there at

Newtown – they used to have late shopping nights up there – and I'm talking to a couple of fellas and they just walked away and I thought “What the hell's going on here?” And any rate these two cops come down and they said to me “What are you laughing at?” I said “I'm not laughing at anything” and they whirled 'round, grabbed me by the shirt and says “Where do you live?” I said “Alexandria”. “Where do you live?” I said “Alexandria” and they start calling me names. “What's your address? Where do you work?”

80.01 I said “Down at McEwan's”. “Do you work down McEwan's?” “Yeah”. “Well, on your way, son”, because we used to make their boots down there. But they had to be tough. I can't say that I'm opposed to them but they just never, ever used much finesse in the things that they do and still aren't PC [politically correct?].

SR: And can you remember any stories? Like you personally mightn't have had any trouble – or even good things about them.

CN: Well, we had a very tough, stupid person here that come from up at Newtown. His name was Appo, Leo – I don't know the Leo but he was Appo, and from the time that he was about twelve he used to frequent the billiard parlours and pools, whatever they call them, and at that stage he was very good and at the age of twelve he got in an argument and he tipped you know the billiard he got and he whacked the bloke on the head with it and that was his first, started off. Well, then he became an absolute madman. If you was up the pub having a drink he'd think nothing of grabbing you and throwing you pick it up. So he had a fight with a chap named Casey and Casey was able to beat him and then for the next month he's sitting outside of his place, waiting for him to come out so he could continue on with the fight. And he finally ran into poor old Casey who had a broken arm. He said “I can't fight you. I've got a broken arm”. He says “Good” and he's into him. And then a chap I went to school with by the name of Jackie Crimmins [?], he was a pretty good street fighter and what have you and this Appo picked him one day. He said “How good are you, Jack?” He said “I don't know. There's only one way to find out, isn't there?” So they went out, he said, and they had a fight and he said “He was giving me some” and he said “He rushed me and we fell over backwards and his nose and his mouth hit the gutter” and he said “You have never seen so much blood in all your life and still wanted to continue with the fight”. So there's a classic example of no brain, no pain, a bad man.

82.11 **SR: Why was it that there seemed to be so much fighting?**

CN: Well, it was just a manifestation, I suppose, of manhood – they get drunk. And just another thing about it. I had a cousin that was in the police force - he was six foot four; I reached about as far as his naval – and he became a policeman up there and we used to have a cop around here by the name of Long Tack Sam. You've probably heard about Long Tack Sam - he was a very courageous bloke. Now, every Saturday afternoon up there at Erskineville there'd be a fight or something and most of the police used to walk down. When they seen the fight they'd turn back and go up but not him. He went right down and he started to clean them up. Well, evidently this Appo was playing up and my cousin was walking with this Long Tack Sam up at Newtown and soon as he seen him he took off and Long Tack Sam says "Keep running, Jack. I only want an excuse to shoot ya". He said he stopped there like a sphinx; you couldn't shift him with a crane. But these are the sorts of things; they're all parts of characters of people. And ultimately he got into trouble, Long Tack Sam, himself.

SR: When you think back about those days, say in the '20s and '30s; is it a positive sort of feel?

CN: Well, I think it was. And, see, today I have an aversion when I see people taking kids to school in cars. Now, I know there might be some reason for it but to me the only chance you've got to develop your own character is to get out of the cocoon of protection within your home. You've got to mix with other people, you've got to understand what's going on because what happens when you leave school and go out into the great big world you haven't got your parents there to tell you what to do, how to do it, and I think this is where it's starting to break down.

84.00 **SR: And people, when they walk to school they talk to everybody?**

CN: Talk to everybody, that's right. And, you know, some people you'd like, some you wouldn't like and so it went on.

SR: Who were your immediate neighbours in this area here and where did most people work?

CN: Well, as I say, growing up we knew everybody. I know the people alongside me here, I know the Greeks but I wouldn't know anybody from there on up.

SR: When you were a kid, though?

CN: When I was a kid, yes. Of course, this was the whole thing. The Whittys had a big family, we had people named Corless [?] that lived next door to us – they were great Irish people. And then we had the

group next to them - that's an interesting thing - people by the name of Kerrish [?]. When they lived in Alexandria their name was Kerrish, when they moved to Mortdale they become Karoosh [?]. And this happened when I went to a twenty-first birthday party: I'm introducing this Gordon Kerrish to my wife. He says "Karoosh, if you don't mind, Cliff". Now, that's an interesting sort of thing because he finished up a very senior position in the Commonwealth Bank, his brother commanded a ship in the Second World War and he went to Alexandria School. He was a very bright person, the dux of the school 'round there and he went from here – there was a great hullabaloo because he went from here down to Jervis Bay in a naval sort of a scholarship and that's how he come to be a commander. And then, of course, again you had parts of the Whitty family. I can remember my brother when he got married he come home and he was sick and he had He dropped from fourteen stone down to nine stone and they brought the new baby home and my father and I were walking up and down, the baby's crying the place down, we didn't know how to keep it quiet.

86.00

Poor old Mrs Whitty come down. She said "Are you having a bit of trouble?" I said "Oh, God". So she just got the bunny rug, wrapped it 'round the kid, put it back in the thing, we never heard another word about it and so it went on.

SR: Was it mostly Anglo sort of community? You talk about Irish here.

CN: Oh, yes, yes, Irish, mostly Anglican Irish. See, and even another thing – that just reminds me – there was a place just the other side of those flats because where those flats are up there, that's where the Whittys lived and there's a fella named Mickey O'Dowd and, of course, they went down and they were pinching the vegetables from the Chinese and they had a blunderbuss and bang it went – it was a series of pellets – and whacked him in the backside, in the back, couldn't kill you and we were sitting up there over a bucket of hot water, picking the pellets out with a needle. That's the only time you ever heard of that. Then, of course, there was the Minnses [?] and so it went on. Oh, no, they were all pretty friendly like in this street here and even down further there was that sort of thing. But it was one of the sort of things that there was compatibility and friendship with people; nobody was just looking out for themselves all the time.

SR: Was it a safe neighbourhood?

CN: I would say yes because now I've been burgled five times and the first time it started is when I become an alderman. Up till then, you see, and they never, ever got anything. That's the whole thing with it: they would have had to put it here to get anything but it's the devastation of coming home and finding it. The only thing that I ever regretted: my father used to have one of those gold watches and I had it there and they pinched that and when they caught the kid the kid was sixteen and his father was keeping it for him out the back. And I said "Well, look, don't worry about me. What about the watch?" and he said "I sold it". Of course, he didn't know who he sold it to. That was really a bit disturbing to me.

SR: But when you were a child in the '20s and '30s would you say it was a safe neighbourhood?

88.01 CN: I would say so. You see, because there was never anything to worry about any of that sort of business and if there was a problem and it would sometimes happen that if the husband was belting somebody up, his wife particularly, they would find an excuse down the pub to sort him out, some people.

SR: Would they?

CN: Yes, they would do that.

SR: How do you know that?

CN: Because I know that: that's what we'd do. They would pick a fight over some inconsequential thing and let him have a go. I'll just tell you this story – you probably might think this is not true – but Mrs O'Reilly down here rang up the parish priest and she says to him "Father, will you come down?" He said "Why can't you come up?" She said "I'm not game to go out", she said "I'm in a bit of a mess". So he went down to see Mrs O'Reilly, knocked on the door and when she opened the door her face was all bruised and her lip was cut and everything. He said "Who's done that to you?" She said "Pat. He's coming home drunk every night and if I say to him 'Cut it out' he just assaults me" so this is what happened. So she said "Will you talk to him, father?" and, of course, a priest talking to an Irishman was like talking to God.

SR: Was that Doc Twoomey?

CN: No, this was another priest at the time. Doc was here but there was another priest there. And what happened with them was that he said "O.K, I'll talk to him" so a couple of nights later Pat's coming down the thing and, of course, he's full and he's singing our battle hymn 'Faith of our Fathers' as he's walking down the street and he's carrying on. So

the priest said "Hey, Pat, I want to see you". He says "That's funny, father, I want to see you". So father said "What's that all about, Pat?" He says "Well, I want to see you" but before he could say a word Pat said "Father, what's fibrositis?" And the priest said "Oh, here's an opportunity". He said "Fibrositis is a very, very painful disease, Pat", he says "and what happens, people who drink excessively, bash their wives up and carry on with other women are usually the ones who suffer the worst" and Pat started laughing.

90.17 He said "What are you laughing at, Pat?" He said "I read in the paper where his Holiness, the Pope is confined to bed with fibrositis". So it goes on. But I've never had any desire to leave here; I've been very happy.

SR: When you were a kid did you roam far?

CN: No, no, no. The worst things that we done was go up there – you see Sydney Park. You see, 'round about 1892 Brickfield Hill was where they used to make all the bricks and they finally found good clay deposits up here at St Peters and that was the top of it but it was difficult to get in it because of the sand and the thing that happened. So when they took the clay all out they left great big holes and that's where we learnt to swim. We would go up – a hell of a lot of kids got drowned up there. There, a place over here just at the back of Waterloo, nearly near to Rosebery there called Burroughs Wellcome – they used to make all the chemicals and various medicines – we used to swim in there and, of course, if you got a mouthful you're sick for a month and when the police used to come you used to grab your pants. You always used to swim in the raw and that sort of thing and you're running off with your pants hanging, everybody screaming out at you, but these were the sort of things that happened.

SR: Was it very polluted?

CN: Oh, yes. Over at Burroughs Wellcome it was. Well, up here it was mostly only mud and clay, the residual runoff and that sort of thing, it wasn't bad.

SR: But what did you swim in at Burroughs Wellcome?

CN: At Burroughs Wellcome you had a great big pit. It was just as deep as what these brick pits up here were.

SR: How did the hole get there? What was that from?

CN: Well, they obviously must have dug that type of clay out over there because, you see, all those were sand hills and they used to sell the

sand for all constructional purposes, the same as Alexandria Park there – I don't know whether you've seen that.

92.04

Alexandria Park was known as Mount Horne and that was a sand hill and they used to sell the sand from there and then it became a tip and then when the council started to get a go on they started to do certain works, put gardens there but, of course, they run out of money and the only way that they could keep the flowers watered was a bloke was given a barter system. He could graze his cows there, six cows, from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening provided he watered the flowers. Well, see, even Alexandria Town Hall when it first got built around there, someone tried to burn it down.

SR: Why?

CN: Don't know. But, see, these are all the things that the books don't tell you because I suppose they think it's an indictment on the area or something, I don't know.

SR: And how do you know about these things?

CN: This is where I've read about all these sort of things, you see, because in this place that they built the town hall 'round in Henderson Road they stayed there for ten years and it was only from 1928 that they really started to improve the town hall. Now, that town hall was used as a temporary school, it was used as a temporary hospital during the bubonic plague in 1918, it was also used as in what's today's entertainment centres because there always dances and things of that nature there. And it's a pity because that has the real history of Alexandria and now there's nothing.

SR: O.K.

CN: I've given you a big hiding. You'll go home with cauliflower ears.

SR: Thank you very much.

Interview ends