

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

‘Millers Point Oral History Project’

INTERVIEW TAPE LOG

INTERVIEWEE: **Nick Pastor & Boris Schkut**
TAPE NUMBERS: MP-FH29-30 (2 tapes)
INTERVIEWER: Frank HEIMANS
DATE AND PLACE: 4 October 2005 at Chippendale NSW
DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 78 mins, 49 secs
RESTRICTIONS ON USE: Nil

Nick Pastor

Boris Schkut

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

00:02 START OF TAPE MP-FH29, SIDE A

00:03 Tape Identification

I will ask questions individually to each of you if you like, but if anybody wants to answer any question that they haven't addressed specifically please do so. First I will get some information about you Boris, if that is okay. Can you tell me your full name and where and when you were born.

BS: Boris Schkut. I was born in Klagenfurt, Austria in 1945.

How did you manage to be born in Klagenfurt, Austria?

1:09 BS: A fairly long story. My mother lost her father, she was in Russia at the time, and they tried to escape, or get away from the Communists as far as I can gather. After she lost her father, she got told about it or never saw him again, she went up to my grandparents, or my father's grandparents actually, and how we got to Austria I don't know, but I sort of remember a train trip. Now I don't know whether that was in Austria, no, I'm sorry - that was in Australia.
The train trip?

BS: Yes.

Who was your father, Boris? Do you know anything about your father?

02:20 BS: No, he never saw me.

Why is that?

BS: Well again I'm not too sure where it was, it was in Russia I believe, that he become a missing person, so he never saw me.

How did he become a missing person, what do you know about that?

BS: Well he was a soldier, he was fighting against the Germans at that stage.

So his nationality was also Russian?

02:59 BS: Oh he was a Russian, but that is about as far as I can tell you about him. Again there's only one photograph of him that ever survived and that was in his Russian uniform.

Do you have that photograph?

BS: No, I think my sister might have it. Would that be right?

NP: I don't think so.

BS: It was only a shot of him from midriff up and he was dressed in his soldier's uniform. That's the only surviving photograph that I can remember.

Do you know where he was killed, in which battle, or something?

03:39 BS: No, no way. I believe at that stage he was in Moscow, but then again I'm not too sure.

So you were born in 1945, so it must have been near the end of the war that you were conceived.

BS: Yes.

So you got to Austria - it was a displaced person camp was it?

BS: Yes it was a camp in Klagenfurt. I remember it was pretty cold because I was always rugged up and there was ice and I remember sort of skating there with my uncle, or him sort of teaching me how to skate, or me falling over. Plenty of snow, yes.

So you are in a displaced person's camp at the age of about what? When did you get to the camp, which year?

BS: I've no idea, no idea at all.

If you have a memory you must have been at least three or four.

04:54 BS: Yes, it would have been three or four.

So before you got to the camp did your mum ever tell you what happened?

BS: No. We were in these huts with my father's grandparents and mum and my uncle, Michael. *What happened to your mother's father, you said he was missing? Was it your mother's father you said was missing?*

05:37 NP: He and her brother were working on a wharf at Yalta and the Germans bombed the area and they were on the ship at the time and they went down with the ship in a German bombing raid - both of them died there, they didn't come back.

05:52 BS: I don't think they knew about that until well after the war, or when mum wrote away to the Red Cross, or whatever.

NP: Her sister got married and moved to Moscow - she was by herself, so she said she was going, going to get out of here, so she went West by herself at sixteen, seventeen or eighteen. *Is it your mother's sister.*

NP: (My mother's) sister got married and moved to Moscow and left.

What happened to her, the sister?

06:36 NP: We found out forty-three years later via the Red Cross that a week after she came down from Moscow to get my mum - my mum had left so they missed within a week or days of each other. They caught up with each other in 1992, or 1991, via the Red Cross, forty-five, forty-seven years later.

BS: I think we had a photo of mum and her sister didn't we?

That's an interesting story. They met in Australia or where?

07:35 NP: Via telephone.

So your mother's sister was still in Russia, was she?

NP: Yes. She stayed with her husband and family there.

Your mother was in Australia?

NP: She took off.

BS: With our father's grandparents. Is that right?

08:01 NP: Then she met your dad and her family on the trip and continued West, trying to get out of the war, basically, out of the fighting.

BS: My father was dead at that stage, wasn't he? Or he was missing. Was he in Austria?

NP: I don't think he made Austria, I think he was still somewhere in Russia fighting and got caught.

BS: Like he was a missing person and it was never confirmed whether he was alive, dead, or whatever.

It is pretty sad isn't it.

NP: Yes, tragic tale.

About how war can divide families and so on.

NP: Just split everything up.

Now Boris you've got some memories of the camp, you mentioned ice-skating.

08:57 BS: Uncle Michael - he sort of looked after me a bit there and he sort of...I followed him around and we went skating. I remember falling over a few times and crying a lot and things. Oh yes, it was a fairyland setting actually, because it was surrounded by mountains, I think the Alps were on the other side. I'm not too sure of Klagenfurt but I am sure the Italian Alps were over the other side, so it was a pretty nice place except for the camp itself which was, you know, the usual thing you'd expect in 1945, in that era.

Were you made to feel a bit like prisoners there?

09:53 BS: Never me, because I had the run of the place and at that age I just sort of roamed around. I can't remember if there were guards there, I think there might have been some sort of security. I can also remember going to the movies with Uncle Michael.

What, at the camp?

10:22 BS: No, no, no. At the camp I don't think there was any sort of The only thing they provided at the camp itself was food and that's about it. I do remember going somewhere to the movies. Again, I'm pretty sure that the movie I watched was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, it sticks in my memory for some reason because of the wicked witch.

So you were in this camp and your family wanted to get out, so what moves did they make to leave?

11:13 BS: My mother originally wanted to go to America and her second choice was Canada. Because she was a single mother America was out and so was Canada and again my father's parents wanted to come to Australia, I have no idea why. Whether their son, Uncle Michael - maybe that was one of the reasons again that they didn't want a family as such to go over there. Anyway, my mother naturally said she would stick with them and come to Australia. She was only very young, I think she was nineteen. Well, she would have been a little bit older by then, maybe twenty. She was still very young.

Did it take very long to get permission to get to Australia?

12:30 BS: I've no idea. I know from the camp we ended up going through wherever. Whether that was a train trip again..... it is always in my memory that we were in these sort of cattle trucks, not like what you see on the Holocaust and that, but not far off it either. It was just bedding and I remember those big doors used to be open because a lot of people were smoking. Again, I don't know whether it was over there or over here.

You were very young.

BS: I do remember the train trips.

How old were you when you actually arrived in Australia?

13:29 BS: That was in 1949, right at the end of 1949, so that would have made me four or five.

Do you remember anything about the ship journey to Australia?

13:42 BS: Oh yes. It was a converted war ship, battle ship, I'm not too sure. Again, I had a good time. Like my mother was sea-sick most of the way, so I sort of just run around a free spirit, more or less, had the run of the place. I had me grandparents there and me uncle – again, I tagged along with him. It was a good adventure and I sort of had fond memories of that trip, very fond memories. Especially when we got to Naples, it was our first taste of fruit; rock melons - I

always remember that; I ate so many rock melons and grapes.

All the things you'd never had before.

14:56 BS: Never, never ever. Like at the camps one of the things I remember is that they'd give you these apples and they'd either be very green or pretty rotten. My grandparents used to heat them up on the little stoves that we had for warmth and for warming up food as well. Yes, it was a big step up.

So you took the ship from Naples to Australia did you?

15:36 BS: Naples, Colombo, we stopped off there. Naples was pretty good, except when they made me go to school there. It was a Catholic school and I can remember that too, getting hit with the cane because I could understand a little bit of Italian but the nuns were pretty strict and I couldn't believe that.

They were pretty strict in Australia in those days as well.

BS: But in Naples, Italy, whatever.

How long did you stay in Naples do you think?

16:22 BS: It was quite some time but again I've no idea. I think I've got a little photograph that could roughly tell you. It would have been a week, maybe more.

Not very long actually.

BS: It was a long time for me. Maybe not so long.

Can you remember the name of the ship you came on?

BS: No idea. Again I think I've got a photograph and it might have the name of the ship on that.

Was it an Italian ship?

17:05 BS: They had little bubblers, or big bubblers I suppose at that stage, and I was trying to have a drink off this bubbler and this person come up behind me and lifted me up so as I could have a drink and he was a black person and I run a hundred miles away. I had never seen a black person before in my life and I just ran. Well after I got over the initial thing they were pretty good. I don't think they were Negro - I think they were South African people. I think it might have been a Pommy ship.

When you find the name of the ship maybe we can make a note later. So what do you remember about arriving in Sydney?

18:22 BS: Well, I can't remember arriving in Sydney. Again, we just travelled and when we got here I think we were in another camp with the half-rounded, semi-corrugated iron things.

They were called Nissen huts.

BS: Whatever. We were there but again I couldn't tell you for how long. My mother ended up getting a job at Ashfield, I think it was. This is another thing, I've only just thought of it actually, she was there as a handy-cook, or whatever, you know, she was an odd-job girl. Eventually, this is after mum left there of course, the woman that was there; and I sort of half remember her now; she was arrested because there was old people and when they died - instead of giving them a burial she buried them out the back somewhere. Mum said, 'I knew she was a bad woman.' Yes, that was another thing that happened.

How was your mother's English?

20:07 BS: Very poor, very poor. Acceptable towards the finish.

Did she pick up enough English to get by?

BS: Oh yes. She could read and write, but it was very pedestrian.

Now this migrant camp that you went to when you first arrived - do you remember where it was?

NP: Bathurst.

BS: Was it Bathurst? I've no idea.

A cold place in winter.

20:51 BS: Again, I never felt any discomfort in any of these places because being young I got the best of everything.

They looked after you.

BS: Exactly and by this stage mum had met a few other people from the ship, the boat, Ukrainians, mainly Ukrainians I think and a few Russian people as well, and they become surrogate aunts and uncles. A lifelong friendship with mum anyway, and us. They became like aunts and uncles in lieu.

NP: They were all in the same boat together so they stuck to each other.

21:55 BS: You've got to remember we were there for a hell of a long time from memory, so you just link up.

Now how did your mother meet the next man that she married - in other words Nick's father?

NP: On-board romance and it just went from there basically.

22:30 BS: She had a few suitors. She had a couple of admirers, two that I know of. I can't remember Peter, but the other Peter, Peter Brock - he became a lifelong friend as well. Like I say, she was a pretty attractive woman.

So she remarried your father Nick, Peter is it? She met him on the trip over, she stayed in touch with him and they married - which year was it that they married?

23:18 NP: A long while later, about 1963, 1962 they got married officially. Up until then they lived with each other.

Now Nick tell me a bit about you, when you were born, in which year?

NP: 1951, May 1951, at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

So this is when your mother was working in Ashfield?

BS: No, this is well after. Again I can't tell you the time frame, but Ashfield was a small part of it. Then Peter, Nick's father, got involved there and from there we moved. I can remember Moore Park, I can remember a few places, and then Millers Point.

So which year was it that you all moved to Millers Point?

24:23 NP: I think it was 1951, wasn't it?

BS: I think I started school in 1952 at Fort Street. No, 1953, so it was in that time.

NP: We were definitely there in 1951 because there are photographs.

So Nick when you were born you think the family lived already in Millers Point.

NP: Yes. 7 Agar Steps, Millers Point.

Can you describe that house for me, either of you?

25:00 BS: Not a house. The dwelling itself is that one up there (*points to drawing of house on his wall*) and we had a room with a kitchen, the original, it was at the back of that place and it was overlooking a terrifically big back yard.

NP: It was originally a two-room flat. A few years later they extended to a four-room flat.

25:35 BS: They drilled a hole through the wall and we ended up having that part as well. So it was a two-bedroom, two kitchens, more or less.

Which level of the house did you occupy?

NP: It was the first floor, we were on the first floor.

Did you have the whole first floor?

NP/BS: No, no, no.

26:05 BS: It was a boarding house.

NP: Just half of the first floor.

BS: The other half there were stairs coming up. It was quite big. Well if you ever go down that way you will see, it is a fairly big premises - very big premises.

26:24 NP: It had good views of the north and the west and it also had good views of the south, overlooking a great back yard.

Why was the backyard so large?

BS: No idea.

NP: It came with the land there.

BS: There were chickens and them bloody dogs, cats.

NP: A cockatoo that swore.

26:56 BS: Oh yes, the cockatoo. I believe someone once said it was a hundred years old and it could mimic Nick, my mother, me. You would hear it and it would be just like mum calling, or Nick. It learned a few tricks and it used to attack me quite a lot. It was a fairly large bird.

NP: A sulphur-crested white cockatoo.

BS: At that stage I was a little bit closer to the ground.

NP: When it swore the land lady, Mrs White used to come out with a bucket of water and throw a bucket of water over it. It swore really well and loud.

27:52 BS: Again, it was a lot of jungle and it was good again for me as a youngster. It wasn't too bad.

Do you remember how big the backyard was in size?

NP: Most likely a quarter of an acre.

BS: Yes.

So what grew in it?

NP: Mostly weeds. Morning Glory, Forget-Me-Nots.

BS: Brambles right at the back.

28:33 NP: Blackberry vines and prickly pear and the ginger plant. Mostly weeds.

So a good assortment of weeds, no trees.

NP: There were banana trees.

BS: The front part of it was looked after a little bit better than the back part, they just give up on that. Maybe it wasn't even their land, maybe it was the people on the sandstone side of it.

There was no fences, so we just roamed through it. Again it was good to play in.

29:28 END OF TAPE MP-FH29, SIDE A

29:30 START OF TAPE MP-FH29, SIDE B

It sounds like it was a pretty interesting house - take me for an imaginary walk through the house from the front door.

29:44 BS: Straight into the kitchen. There was a window, naturally, and the table was in front of that. The ice-box was on that side. Then the stove was over there.

NP: You had to put the pennies in to get it going.

30:15 BS: The sink was beside that as well. There was a window there because you could look out and see Darling Harbour, as it is now, and you could see the P&O boats, it was quite scenic. Whenever they came in we all knew what they were and what they weren't. Then straight into the bedroom. My bed was on that side.

NP: Facing south.

30:55 BS: Then the double bed for mum and dad and that was it.

Now did you have a separate room for you kids?

31:03 BS: No, one room. It was one room. At that stage, this is originally, it was nowhere near as big as this room, I can assure you of that. My bunk, little bed, and the double bed was over that way and that was it, you just walked into it and there was nothing else.

NP: But then they extended.

31:40 BS: Well that was eventually, when you come along. They put a hole through the thing.

Now Boris as a refugee child how were you treated by the Australians, so to speak, the other kids?

31:53 BS: First day at school wasn't all that good. I couldn't speak English, I only knew a few words, and I got a little bit..... even the teachers were a little bit prejudiced. My first teacher, Mrs Bowsfield, she scared me because I couldn't communicate. Yet, like I say, I could get by with a bit of German, Russian naturally, and even understood a little bit of Italian, but English, no. Of course at home we only spoke Russian. Yes it took me a little while, took me a few knocks, but I think it hardened me up a hell of a lot. I got a few beltings. Gee whiz, they worry about bullying today - in them days every day I used to get pushed, shoved, kicked, punched.

33:14 NP: But in the end you ended up beating most of the boys up, so no one touched you.

BS: Yes, that come in the course of time. But if it hadn't have been for mum picking me up at three o'clock - she had to be there nearly every day to pick me up to walk me only just about a hundred-odd metres to get me home.

So what was Fort Street Primary School like for you Boris?

33:51 BS: Originally it was a bit tough but gradually as my English improved, the last few years there were more comfortable. I suppose every kid goes through it, but I think I had just a little bit more trouble because of the language problem and custom problems as well.

Adjusting, yes. What about you Nick? You went to Fort Street also did you?

NP: Yes Fort Street Primary.

Did you have the dreaded Mrs Bowsfield as well?

34:24 NP: No, I missed her, she might have passed on by the time I was there. I had a very nice teacher, Mrs McNeeholme (??), as a Kindergarten teacher. She was very nice and a lovely looking lady and everyone liked her. I didn't go through what Boris went through, I think he paved the way for me. Most of the bullies left me alone, otherwise he would have got them, so I had a clear run. I had a great time at Fort Street, I enjoyed it, I've still got friends from Kindergarten and the years that I was there.

BS: So have I, because we still keep in contact, the old Millers Point, you know.

Now Nick can you give me an idea of what it was like growing up in Millers Point for a kid of your age, from the time you can remember.

35:27 NP: One big adventure. Either playing at Observatory Hill or the tennis court, playing in a little park next to the tennis court, or going to the fire station, or going to King George.

Playing over the Harbour Bridge eventually, riding our bicycles over the Harbour Bridge. Playing in the train subways, walking down the abandoned tram tracks, tram tunnels. Fishing off the wharves, swimming off the wharves. Going to the city to the movies. We had it all, we had one good adventure. Happy memories and safe, no one got hurt.

And Boris, what about you, what do you remember about those things and your childhood?

36:32 BS: Yes it was pretty exciting. The Bridge was part of my life. I've walked over it, I've walked over the arch. When you got up to the top there was no things hanging off there, you hung on because the bloody wind was so strong and you actually swayed. I've been underneath it and on the far side of the pylon. It was very foolhardy, actually. Opposite the pylon, the other pylon, and one school holiday, or whatever, we were underneath where the planks for the painters who used to paint the nuts and the bolts, this is just under where the trains and the trams used to run, we found this little passageway and it was into the pylon itself, the far end, you know. Every second railing was missing, so we got one of the painter's ropes and tied it around about five or six, I forget how many. One of the blokes had the little lamp that you had on the bike, might have even had a bike down there as well, although we all didn't have bikes in those days. He stuck it on his belt and it was a sheer drop. These stairs, where we moved, there would be one flight of stairs and the next one would be missing, one flight of stairs, one missing. That flight of stairs, we sort of had the railing and the ledge where the stairs were, these were steel stairs. What do you call them Nick, those steel stairs, they are still down there? They were that thick across and they used to rivet them in, but to stop people going up there they took every second or alternate flight away, so there was a drop. There we were climbing up there and when we got up to the top they had the records of the bridge and the photographs of the building, the documentation, and it was all handwritten.

39:40 NP: Was that the southern pylon?

BS: The one on that side, the park side.

NP: The north side pylon?

BS: There is the pylon that people go up.

NP: The southern one.

BS: It is right opposite the other one.

NP: Not on the north side, the southern side.

NP: That was never open for the public.

40:16 BS: And the rats, I don't know how they lived there but they were humungous. We know they eat each other but that was the only way they could have survived. It is a pity I never thought of taking some of those photos, that would have been very interesting. But the records they were all leather bound. We walked around, but after the rats we sort of went straight back down again. But that was a pretty risky thing because no one had been up there and if one falls we all fall because we were all tied together with a rope, very stupidly. Yes, that was one thing. *Now tell me you saw something happen off that bridge, didn't you, some dramatic event, what was it? When a man jumped off it or something.*

41:20 BS: Well, I never saw it but he was living right up the top. Where we were there was a sort of one room. He was a nice bloke. Originally there was murder there. *This is in your house, 17 Agar Steps?*

NP: The top flat.

41:54 BS: I don't know how many people were living there. You'd say hello or goodbye. *Tell me about the murder first.*

42:15 BS: Apparently this man invited back a man and a woman after drinking at the hotel and they brought a few beers with them. I don't know whether it was a robbery or just a fight over the woman or whatever, anyway, the man and the woman killed him, they hammered him, they had a hammer, or got hold of a hammer. Again I'm not too sure whether it was a robbery, or just drunkenness, or whatever. They caught up with them, not that day. It may have happened that night, because of the noise - you could hear stuff there. I can't recall but I can remember the police being there sort of afterwards. Again, my mother wouldn't say much. *How old were you then?*

43:11 BS: I've no idea. Seven, eight, nine. I was going to school. It was some time later and there was a radio show called *Police Files* and it was on that, and they all said, 'Oh you've had a murder up there,' and it was all big news. So I was about eight, nine, ten, if that. *Do you remember the man's name who was killed?*

BS: No, no idea.

So that happened upstairs in the attic room. Then something else happened there later?

BS: Yes. He jumped off the bridge.

NP: One of the residents, yes.

44:11 BS: He was a nice bloke too, I remember him. I can remember him because he had a jeep and it was always parked down the front of the stairs.

NP: Left-hand drive as well.

BS: An American jeep.

NP: We used to play in it.

BS: We'd play there, jump out of it and pretend, whatever it was.

What was his name, do you know?

BS: No.

NP: I've forgotten.

44:39 BS: I can remember him but again, I've no idea.

Tell me some of the names of your other co-tenants in that house, who the people were who lived on different floors.

BS: Mr and Mrs White, they were the landlord/landlady.

NP: The Gatfields used to live above us. The Coffeys, I remember the Coffeys.

BS: Yes that was a sad family, that was very sad, the Coffeys.

NP: Charlie downstairs.

BS: The Coffeys were very sad.

Why, what happened to the Coffeys?

45:26 NP: They used to fight and scream and throw things at each other.

BS: They had a baby as well and when they got on the grog oh gee whiz, the poor old baby, you know. Again in them days you didn't do too much, you sort of stayed away. We were New Australians, so you don't meddle into Australian stuff. He was pretty violent, she just had continual black eyes. Sober - wonderful, but the grog.

Was that a problem around Millers Point that the men used to drink too much?

BS: There was a lot of drinking, but that is the only incident that I know of.

Now Millers Point, being a maritime precinct, a lot of seamen and so on, what atmosphere? What do you

remember about those sort of activities and the support system for those? Like the wharves, the wool stores and all that kind of thing.

46:39 BS: Most of the people there worked either by being merchant seamen, like they become a cabin boy first up, then a deck boy and go up to AB and all that. A lot of them went on the wharves.

NP: Stevedores.

BS: Yes. A few worked in the wool stores.

NP: Night watchmen.

BS: Yes. It all revolved around that type of thing.

47:20 NP: I don't think they had any support systems. The pubs were their support systems, the hotels.

BS: The call-up for the merchant seamen - they had what they called a call-up.

NP: And they were all unionists, very Labor-orientated.

47:46 BS: Labor-Communist orientated. I think at that stage it was more Communist than Labor.

NP: Probably.

BS: Because the Communists, they ruled the wharves, you know what I mean, that was it.

Now Boris, last time I was here you was telling me about some of the activities around Millers Point. You told me about some of the coopers that made barrels and things like that, tell me about that again.

48:20 BS: Right next door to the fire station there was an old cooper's place and we'd sneak in there on weekends when they didn't work. It was just a sort of a little hideaway that we had and we would come from Fort Street Girls' High School, not Fort Street Primary, and get in the back way. They never used to lock it up anyway. It was dilapidated. I don't think I have ever seen a photograph of it, we should have taken one, although we didn't have a camera, most probably.
Is this where they made the barrels for the beer?

BS: Yes.

Where was it exactly?

BS: Do you know the fire station?

In Kent Street?

49:12 BS: It was right next door to that. It was there and above the barrel place again there was all jungle at the back of Fort Street Girls' High School.

What was going on in Gas Lane?

NP: It was more the metal-type industries, nuts and bolts. Sort of like engineering shops, I think.

BS: Gas Lane - where was that?

NP: Yes.

Wasn't there a kind of a cave there?

BS: Okay, yes. It was a big..... it was always cold, it was always mouldy, it was always wet.

NP: That was one of our friend's back yard. How they built the houses - they've cut a massive sandstone block away and built these houses and it was just a natural type of cave that went who knows how far.

50:43 BS: They had these big boxes there as well, I don't even know what they ever put in them. We used to use them as cubby houses and all that.

NP: Straw stuffing.

BS: It was something like Playfair Street, if you have ever seen the places that are built along the wall - the sun never shines there. We were going to move into Playfair Street and mum went up there and had a look at a couple of the places there and they were so depressing. They had nets - not nets, wire across it because up the top of Playfair, whatever it was, people would throw rocks or stuff over and so you had to have this meshing over your backyard which would have been very small. It was only for protection, but it was again a very depressing thing. Sandstone there and never see the sun and mum said, 'No way, no way.'

51:56 NP: There was Isle's Transport Company, trucks and cars.

BS: Of course, a trucking company, where the hotel is now.

NP: Down in Kent Street. Opposite the tennis court there was another engineering firm, because we used to get the ball-bearings to make our wheelbarrows.

BS: Used to play tennis against that green thing. Put a line across, roughly.

NP: Their big roller-door, yes.

52:26 BS: On the weekends that was our tennis, we would play tennis against each other. We couldn't get into the tennis court - the tennis court people would be playing there. *The same tennis court that still exists you mean, in Kent Street?*

BS: Oh yes.

You had quite a bit of playground there, lots of nooks and crannies and so on.

BS: Oh yes.

Now tell me a bit about the ships when they used to come in to unload, there was quite a bit of activity wasn't there, did you play on those ships?

52:57 BS: I had a paper run there for a little while. Yes we'd get on board there, or I'd be helping someone. I'd be helping someone. They always made you work two out when you went aboard the ship, for obvious reasons, I suppose. I was never molested or anything else like that, but that was one of the reasons that they always said two out, we can look after each other. It was quite good, we had the run of the ship, no one ever worried about us.

53:54 NP: From our window we could see them coming in, they were either cargo ships or passenger liners coming in, unloading people or materials.

BS: This was all done manually, it wasn't the containers - wharfies did the whole lot. *I believe Boris, or Nick, you raided the kitchen of the ships at some stage.*

BS: That was me. We used to do that, yes.

To get some extra food?

BS: Again they had cakes and stuff which we didn't get too often.

NP: Chocolates.

54:28 BS: Whatever it was. Also when the shipping lines came in we'd get on board there and as young teenage-type things because they always had pretty girls on there. *Now tell me a bit about the shops in the area, who owned what shops that you remember.*

NP: Down at the bottom of Agar Steps was Tommy and Josie.

BS: That's about it, I can remember them. There was another bloke there before them.

NP: Mr Wilson? He was the greengrocer was he?

55:16 BS: He was a greengrocer, yes. Jacko. Also this bloke used to park down High Street,

like facing from the steps on a Friday morning and he'd have the vegetables. I went to Jacko.

NP: Or Mr Wilson - it was Wilson definitely.

BS: I thought his name was Jacko. He had all the fruit things that he got from wherever.

NP: Tommy and Josie was just a general store down at the bottom of Agar Steps.

What about hair cuts, where did you get your hair cut?

56:07 BS: There was two. There was Rube Lewis on one side and I think the other bloke was Bill. Out of the two of them Bill was the haircut man and Rube was whatever. I think he was a baccarat dealer, that was his go, and this was his sort of whatever, like.

Was he a bit of a shady character?

56:54 BS: He was small in size, he was balding, there's nothing there to suggest he was anything. But he had all these cards in the window and if you have ever been to an illegal game you know that they only play it for about one hand, practically and they just shot them out and a new pack comes in. Sometimes when I was coming back from the movies he'd be on the tram with us. No, he'd be going, we'd be coming in and he'd be going, you know half-past nine, ten o'clock, maybe a bit later. He could have been a dealer, he had something to do with it for sure because he had all these cards and they'd been used.

He had comics as well, didn't he?

57:52 BS: Oh yes. You could either buy them or exchange them and it used to be two for one. You know, you'd give him two and you could take one, or one penny, two penny, whatever. When he wasn't looking I sort of stick one underneath the other. He'd say, 'Have you got anything there?' 'What do you mean?' He pulled out this big gun and said, 'What have you got there?'

He had a gun?

BS: Oh yes. It was huge. It wasn't like a Colt, this was a serious gun. He always wore an apron naturally and he pulled that out and I said, 'Oh yes, I've got two.' I mean he was only joking, but it scared me, I never did that for a while afterwards.

59:12 END OF TAPE MP-FH29, SIDE B.

00:16 START OF TAPE MP-FH30 SIDE A

Now Nick tell me a bit about Peter, your father, and what you remember about him and what sort of work he did.

NP: Well, he was basically a salesman, whatever he could find.

BS: He drove a cab.

00:48 NP: ACI glass factory at Moore Park, he was there for a while. At the railways for a while. A sales person for a while. A cab driver. So he always had some sort of job, employment wasn't a problem I don't think with him. His problem was trying to find a job he liked, I suppose, or a high-paying one. But he always had a job, a driving job or a salesman job.

Did he mix into the neighbourhood pretty well, the neighbourhood of Millers Point?

01:26 NP: No, no, no. No, he never. Like with his ethnic peer groups, I think his heart lay back in Russia, I suppose.

How was his English, was it okay?

NP: Acceptable, he got by, he got by. Writing, reading, he was quite clever.

Boris, being your stepfather how did you get on with him?

02:12 BS: Oh yes. I stuck with mum, I think that's about it. He was never a bad person but whatever mum said to me I took as being it. I never accepted him as my father, that's for sure, stepfather, he was just there as far as I was concerned. We always had food, always had clothing, but no.

Nick, your mum, how did she mix in with the Millers Point community?

03:04 NP: She was quite friendly, she had a lot of friends in Agar Steps and she knew quite a few of the mums and dads from primary school. Yes, I think she worked a lot and home duties, she didn't really join any of the...

BS: She used to come along when I was in the Cubs and stuff or parents' days she'd be there. She did it that way.

03:40 NP: But Millers Point if you weren't there for fifty, sixty or eighty years you were never a true Millers Pointer, you were always an outsider.

I think that still happens today. So you are growing up Nick in Millers Point, you must have made friends with the other kids. You weren't regarded so much as a foreigner because you was born there.

NP: Yes, I was more or less one of the boys, just another kid on the street. I still have a lot of friends from the 1950s.

Was fishing a big part of your lives?

04:22 NP: A lot of my friends..... I didn't quite like fishing but I joined their escapades and I liked the adventures, whether we sneak onto a wharf or borrowed a punt and went under the wharves, or swam around off the wharf. I caught my fair share of leather-jackets and tailor, a bream now and then.

BS: Bream always.

NP: A few mackerel.

BS: Mackerel - that's the one, mackerel, not bream.

NP: There was a lot more fish in the harbour and they were very tasty too.

BS: I don't know about the mackerel.

He doesn't like mackerel - it's a bit oily is it?

05:14 NP: I think it is a fish that wasn't regarded very highly, eating-wise.

BS: Maybe in a soup, smothered in everything else.

Was it a big part of your diet, fish?

NP: No.

BS: No. We'd go to the fish shop down the corner.

Who owned the fish shop, do you remember the name of the people?

BS: I can't recall.

NP: Marie?

BS: No, Marie and that owned the milk bar on the corner. They were Greeks or something.

05:54 NP: They had a lot of batter on their fish, it was more batter than fish.

BS: Doesn't matter, it was great.

Was the place getting more multicultural as you were growing up?

BS: It was predominantly the people there that owned the shops. Like Tommy, was he a Greek or an Italian? No I'm sure he was a Greek, him and Josie.

06:22 NP: He was sort of albino. He could be a Greek, I'm not too sure.

BS: Josie was Greek. Most of the shop owners were from other countries.

NP: Except the butcher was an Australian, John Parish wasn't it. A few others were all Australian, butchers.

BS: Another thing there - the SP shops, do you know what that is - there was plenty of them, they were everywhere. Friday night trots you'd have Jackie Cox sitting up there, he'd be the cockatoo, he'd be the look-out.

We have heard of the SP bookie at the Palisade Hotel, which ones do you know?

07:25 BS: Oh the Palisade, well it wasn't actually in the Palisade in them days, they were round the corner in Bettington Street. You'd walk in there and have a bet, or you'd go down to Windmill Street, there was another one. There was one in the dry cleaner's shop, opposite King George Playground.

NP: One in Susannah Place.

BS: Yes. Ray Smith's old place. You could get a bet on anywhere from Friday night right through to Saturday night dogs.

Now with all those pubs around the place, there were about seven or eight pubs in Millers Point, were there any fights at times or what? What do you remember?

08:17 BS: Always. Always a few good fights on Friday and Saturday nights. If the Pommies or the Swedes or the Norwegians..... and they used to rage, it wasn't just outside the pubs there would be fights going on everywhere. If one of our boys was involved in it, it wouldn't take long and someone would find out and they'd run to whichever pub our blokes were and they'd come down and the other blokes would come off their ship and it would be on. I mean there were some terrific blood baths.

What were the fights about?

09:02 BS: Oh grog. Just the drinking. You know a shove or a push, something to do. It was the culture of being a fighter. I mean, if they didn't fight, whoever'd come off, they'd fight each other.

NP: A culture of being a good drinker, holding your drink.

Now Nick tell me a bit about your education after primary school, what did you do?

09:29 NP: I went to Cleveland Street Boys' High, where I did my Intermediate, Higher School

Certificate. I went to sixth form anyway. Intermediate, Lower and Higher School Certificates, I did them all.

And you Boris?

09:56 BS: I went to Cleveland Street High School and I got my Intermediate and Leaving Certificate, which was equivalent to what Nick did, but they changed the system. The next step, depending on how good you passed in the Leaving, was to go to university. Not that I ever contemplated it, after the Intermediate I didn't want to go any further, that was it. I wanted to go to sea and become a merchant seaman, a cabin boy.

What happened to that idea?

10:40 BS: My grandparents bribed me a little bit, said they would give me five pounds a week, coming into the exams, but I'd have to go there from Monday to Friday so they could supervise me studying. If I was down there at Millers Point it would be 'Boris,' 'Yes, I'll be right down there,' and you know I'd be out with the boys and girls and whatever. Anyway, a few months before each exam I'd go down there.

What were these exams in Boris? Was it Accountancy that you studied?

11:34 BS: Oh that was afterwards. I did Accountancy to the Leaving, I don't know why I didn't like it. Then afterwards, after I got the Leaving Certificate, I got a job as an Accounts Clerk and they said, 'Could you go and do some more,' get whatever else it was: Audit I, Audit II. I stuck it out for a little while, but at the finish I went, 'No more.'

So what did you work at most of your life Boris?

12:18 BS: As a clerk. After I got rid of that I got onto the City Council, again as an Accounts Clerk, but it was dead easy. After what I'd been through it was just a cup of tea. I stayed there for twenty-five years.

Nick, tell me a bit about your work career.

12:44 NP: Well I originally wanted to astronomer because of the Sydney Observatory and in the 1950s and 1960s the space race, all the movies and the TV series which were about space. But I didn't have the maths or the physics to get there, so I became a horticulturalist, a landscaper, instead. That is basically it.

Are you still doing that now?

NP: I am.

That is a satisfying job.

13:25 NP: It is. I'm sure the weeds that grew in our back yard taught me a lot. Observatory Park and the gardeners, we knew them up there. I still like fig trees.

Now when did you actually leave the house at 7 Agar Place? Does anybody remember?

NP: 1964, the end of 1964.

BS: Anna must have been born about then.

NP: 1963 she was born.

That's your sister?

NP: Yes.

Where did you go?

14:09 NP: We moved to Darlington.

BS: It is only just around the corner actually, it's not that far.

NP: My father purchased a house there and basically restored it to some sort of liveable condition. It had eight rooms, so it took us all. It had a reasonable yard.

BS: Yes it wasn't too bad. A room each.

Did you miss Millers Point as an area to live?

BS: Oh yes.

NP: I did too, of course.

So what was it that attracted both of you to Millers Point?

14:54 BS: Oh friends, I suppose. You move from there and Darlington-Chippendale at that time is not like you see this, this is all yuppie stuff, then it was a tough joint. It didn't worry me at all, but the people were knockabout, they were all workers. Again, the pubs predominated, there was a pub on every corner. Again, so what? SPs opposite my place and SPs in the hotel. The area was not like Millers Point - I mean I'd go back every weekend, I'd be back at Millers Point on a Friday night, bang over there, because that is where my friends were. There was nothing here.

NP: Most people were at Millers Point, our friends.

BS: It took a long time.

NP: Our contacts.

So Nick, when you think back to Millers Point what sort of memories come to your head?

16:13 NP: Oh happy, adventurous, always something to do, something new to explore. Yes get into a bit of danger. Had some nice, sunny hot summery days there too, and some wet ones. Yes good memories, fond memories. Our parents were young and we were at the beginning of everything - it was a good adventure.

BS: The 1960s, wonderful.

NP: There was just so much to do and see and places to go. You didn't necessarily need money.

BS: There was none.

17:01 NP: It was just a whole world in your backyard there to go and enjoy and people to meet and people to keep away from.

Sounds good. So what are your thoughts on the fact that Millers Point is no longer going to be a working harbour as from next year when the Patrick Wharves are going to be vacated?

17:30 BS: Disappointing if these developers get their way, which they will. They will, they will. You know, start small and then bang and they are going to destroy a wonderful part of Sydney.

NP: Well that's progress. Everyone wants to live there, everyone wants their little share. Well, good luck to them mate, but it is nothing like the 1950s and 1960s, so they will never see Millers Point as it used to be.

BS: Of course not, progress is progress.

18:10 NP: It has changed completely, the people have changed completely. All the original Millers Pointers have either died or moved on.

BS: Or they are all up the coast.

NP: They are just trying to pack as many people in there as possible and make as much money as possible.

So do you think you might have lived in the golden age of Millers Point?

NP: Definitely, oh yes.

18:36 BS: There's friendships there that will go on for ever. Like I said we still have our reunions every Christmas and when sad things happen we are always there, well my group. When there is a lot of good news too we sometimes bump each other. Yes, the friendships there will

never be broken - that's for sure. We come through a good time.

Is there anything else you want to talk about? We have just about covered it, I think, nothing I have forgotten to ask you, or anything?

NP: No.

Thank you very much then, thank you for the interview.

19:38 END OF INTERVIEW WITH BORIS SCHKUT AND NICK PASTOR AND END OF TAPE
MP-FH 30 SIDE A.