

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
REDFERN, WATERLOO AND ALEXANDRIA
TRANSCRIPT

Name: Sir Nicholas Shehadie

Date: 30 September 1994

Place: ?

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR: 30th September 1994. Thanks for talking to me, Sir Nicholas. Where were you born?**

NS: In Coogee on the 15th of November 1926.

SR: And did you grow up in Redfern?

NS: Yes. We lived in Redfern and my mother was rushed to hospital at Coogee, a private hospital and the butcher's nephew which was opposite our – we lived at 95 Walker Street Redfern and the butcher

was Jack Barber who was a legend at the time and his nephew was the only one who had a car and his name was Allan Dalziel who later finished up Dr Evatt's private secretary and I saw him in latter years and he drove my mother to the hospital.

SR: Was there not a hospital in Redfern where your mother could have gone?

NS: No. Well, I'm not sure about those days but this was a private hospital and I was twelve pounds and I always recall my mother saying she's had a bloody little elephant.

SR: Yes. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

NS: Yes. I have two older sisters, one brother younger and one sister younger and we all lived in Redfern. We lived in 88 Buckingham Street Redfern, Great Buckingham Street, for a long time and then when my grandparents died we moved into 95 Walker Street.

SR: What are your earliest memories of that area?

NS: Well, my grandparents came out here, and my parents, I think it was about 1914, I understand and my grandfather was an orthodox priest and he was the first orthodox priest in this country and he built the church on the corner of Walker and Redfern Street and I think that was about 1916 if I remember correctly.

2.00

Then my grandfather died and my father who was also qualified, he studied in Russia theology although he was a chemist and he had a pharmacy shop on Broadway where Tooths Brewery is now. And I recall very much that we've never had a meal on our own because the home of the priest or the clergyman was always a central point for any new arrivals coming in or people coming down from the country and the Lebanese you could count on your hands. Most of them were in the country areas but those in the city all lived around Redfern and the Lebanese are synonymous, I think, with Redfern.

SR: How big would the community have been there?

NS: I think I'd be talking in the city in hundreds and not the thousands that there are today and they were all very good and hardworking citizens. They'd come out to this country and the majority of them took up hawking, you know, with a suitcase and the clothes and I don't think there's a country town in Australia without a Lebanese storekeeper. And there was a famous old gentleman called Stanton Mellick who built a warehouse in Elizabeth Street Redfern and the warehouse is still standing but, of course, Stanton died at the age of ninety five. I

married his grandniece; that's how I know so much about him. And he couldn't read or write and I recall that he had a member of the Taxation Office always situated in his office to make sure he did the right thing. But he was a marvellous old man and he used to finance a lot of these people to go out hawking and, of course, he benefited by that: they had to buy from him. But I remember him distinctly and I think he only died in the '50s, as I say in his nineties and he was a marvellous old man.

4.02 **SR: What kind of a kid were you?**

NS: Cheeky, I think like any normal kid. I think being born in the middle of a family of five children I was a bit of a loner at home but I had lots of friends from outside. I loved sport, I didn't wear shoes very much. I went to Cleveland Street School and I had some fine schoolmates, although we didn't get into trouble we used to stand on the corner and talk and race around the block and do funny things like that. And the Redfern Empire, we used to go to the pictures there which I think it became a stage club after that. It's on the corner of Cleveland Street and Walker Street now and we used to go to the pictures up there. Des Collins was the owner of that and he threw us out on odd occasions and we were barred but they were fun things; we didn't get into much trouble.

SR: What kind of house did you live in?

NS: In Buckingham Street it was a terrace house which still stands and my brother was born in 88 Buckingham Street Redfern but the house on the corner of Walker and Redfern Street which is now Housing Commission was a lovely old home. It was a big home and the church was behind it and I have some very fond memories there and the Albert View Hotel was right opposite. And we had a beautiful wall where all the boys, we used to sit there on a Saturday afternoon waiting for a fight to start in the pub and we were never disappointed; some very good street fighters in those days.

SR: That was quite a common thing to watch the fights at the pub around closing time, wasn't it?

NS: Yes, but they were all good people at the same time; they'd all help each other; by Monday morning they were all friends again.

SR: So how would you describe your family?

5.59 NS: A very close family – we still are. Both my parents are dead now. I know when we had to move from Redfern because of the Housing Commission it upset my mother greatly but she soon adapted to Randwick where we had a small cottage in Randwick afterwards but I

was twenty one at that time and we were all grown up. But, as I say, we were very close and I mentioned earlier as we didn't have a meal together it was very hard to have much of a family and what we did we enjoyed very much.

SR: You know how you said your father was a chemist and then he was also trained as a minister? So when your grandfather died did that mean he became the minister?

NS: Yes.

SR: What denomination was that?

NS: Orthodox, it's the Antioch Orthodox Church. My father built it at the other end of the corner of Cooper and Walker Street now and my father died before it was finished being built.

SR: Really?

NS: Yes.

SR: How old was he when he died?

NS: He was in his middle fifties when he died.

SR: That's very young.

NS: Yes. That was in 1951. Yes, it was; it was rather a shock.

SR: And who finished the church?

NS: Well, the committee finished the church. Then there was a series of priests after that that they've brought out now. But he was very respected in the area. I always remember people in Redfern always raised their hat to my father as he walked down the street and those were the days when you'd leave your front door open and nobody went without food and everyone helped each other; great days of Redfern and I'm very, very proud of Redfern. I'm a Redfern boy and I'm very proud of it.

SR: Did your father wear a black outfit?

NS: Yes. Well, he had a black suit and I used to wear his hand-down shoes in those days - nobody had very much money. He was a very great friend of Bill McKell, Bill McKell who was our local member who later became premier of New South Wales and governor general of Australia.

8.05

And I used to run messages for old Bill McKell who was a legend in Redfern; everyone just loved him. I can remember on election day old

Stanton Mellick used to say to him, "Billy, how much calico do you want?" so he could put the signs up to vote for Billy McKell and he was a politician everyone adored.

SR: And why did they like him so much?

NS: Well, he was so warm, he was so accessible. He lived in Dowling Street and Bill was just one of the people and I think because of this, above all politics, Bill was just a good Australian and he died in his nineties and it was a very sad day and only recently.

SR: So your father did actually serve as the minister to the local Lebanese community?

NS: Yes.

SR: Or was it the Anglo people?

NS: No, it was the Lebanese community. They had the Maronite Church and it's still there in Elizabeth Street Redfern and the Orthodox Church was always in Walker Street.

SR: What sort of man was your father – how would you describe him?

NS: An academic, didn't like me playing sport until he read my name in the paper a couple of times and then I happened to see him sneaking out there and having a look and then he became involved. He was very serious, very clean. He'd never touch the front gate, he'd always push it open with his foot. If he'd touch the front gate he'd go and wash his hands and keep washing. He was a very popular man, my father, very tall. My brother looks like my father and I look like my mother and she was cheeky and liked a lot of fun. I love parties and I think she and I are of the same mould.

10.01 **SR: And you would have a lot of people coming to your house as a social centre?**

NS: I can remember we had a cigarette machine in the house we'd get that many people coming and going. Yes, and, as I say, they were good days. Nobody had very much but what we had there was a lot of love and affection and this went for the whole community, be it Lebanese, Aboriginal or Anglo-Saxon so it was fine.

SR: Were your parents politically involved?

NS: No. All they knew was Bill McKell and that's all. Nobody, if it was Liberal or Labor or what, Bill McKell was just a good man and Bill never,

ever forgot his roots in Redfern and the Redfern people of those days never forgot Bill.

SR: In your family what sort of discipline was used?

NS: Well, I was very naughty. I can recall I'd jump out of windows at night and sneak out with the boys and come back and I was caught smoking at an early age. I wasn't a saint but at the same time I was just doing the normal naughty things that one does but we were pretty strict and nobody had any money so you couldn't do much at all. There's no way would we ever break or enter into a place although I do recall one day I was kicked up the backside by the police. I'd just started to play football and I had to play against the policeman on the next Saturday and it was very great tackling him. He later became a member of parliament.

SR: Who was that?

NS: Tim Walker. He became a member for Sutherland or somewhere in the state government.

SR: Your father would have been much better educated than most of the locals. Is that correct - - -

NS: Yes.

SR: - - - being a chemist and that and also with his religious training yet you weren't an affluent family.

12.00 NS: No. My father spoke seven languages fluently. He was an academic and it didn't rub off on me, of course, and, as I say, he was very serious and worried about people. He died helping people and it wouldn't matter. Even the locals, the Anglos, would always come to dad and I can recall he'd always go to Bill McKell who was then premier and demanded that he's got to help this person or that person. No, he was very well-respected and respected by all the people.

SR: What sort of impact did the Depression have on your family?

NS: What I remember about the Depression, we shared food. We had two bakeries in Redfern. There was Jones' Bakery in Walker Street and there was Lovelies(?) in Morehead Street and we as young kids used to help distribute the bread down at the paddock to the people who'd line up. And that's what I remember mainly about the Depression, handing out bread from the back of a cart free to some other people.

SR: What's the "paddock"?

NS: Well, it was just a vacant allotment just down the road, down on the other side of Redfern Street in Walker Street. Halfway down the hill there was an open block there and they used to assemble down there.

SR: Your father would have had his own shop, wouldn't he, the pharmacy?

NS: Well, he had his shop but that was in Broadway.

SR: So he didn't lose his job in the Depression or anything – he would have maintained his business?

NS: Yes but there was nothing there. Nobody had any money so he'd be giving half off or free of charge. I don't think anyone had any money but they had love and affection and warmth. I think it's something we've lost today.

SR: So you were born in '26. You would have been two when the Depression started, really, in '28.

NS: Yes.

SR: So what can you remember of the outbreak of World War II?

14.01 NS: O.K. Well, I was at school nearly till the finish of the war. I can't remember very much beforehand of World War II. I remember at school - well, you know, being young what does one think of the war? I mean we had restrictions.

SR: What were they?

NS: I think you needed permits to travel anywhere. We couldn't travel anyhow because we had no money.

SR: Were you considered aliens, by the way, or anything like that?

NS: No, no, no. I don't recall anyone in Redfern being considered an alien. I think there were Germans and Italians but I don't know any in Redfern in those days who were interned. The only Italians I remember were Davolis(?) that had the fruit shop down on the corner of Young and Cleveland Street but I don't know whether they were interned or not. And then later Gino Bambagiotti came and opened a bike shop and he was a champion Italian bike rider, a big chap. When we had the sports arena in Surry Hills we used to go up.

SR: Can you remember when the Japanese came into the harbour, can you remember what life was like? I believe that they had

blackouts and you had air raid practices and sirens. What can you recall?

NS: Well, we had those and to be honest it seems to be a blank to me at the moment. I do recall that submarines were in the harbour, I recall that Darwin was being bombed. I know I was about sixteen and a half and I tried to join up and I got knocked back because I had a dislocated shoulder. The war was just about finished anyhow. I went over to Newtown where you sign up; I was going to forge my parents' signatures and all sorts of things. I don't remember but I remember lots of the Lebanese boys in Redfern who went to the war got knocked about and some didn't come back.

SR: What was the feeling or the mood in Redfern at that time and in your home, your family?

16.02 NS: Well, everyone was feeling for those boys who were away and the families that had lost their close and loved ones but, as I say, there was so much warmth - different today - I mean you leave your door open. Mrs So and So up the road's not well and the ladies are up there, trying to help her or getting her some food. It was great. I think I was brought up in the best times of this country.

SR: Were you expected to contribute to the family say by the time you got to be about ten? Like I've heard stories from other people who were in the Depression era, whatever, that they'd take bilycarts and go 'round to factories and collect things. And was you hot water and all your heating wood or did you have gas?

NS: No, we had wood.

SR: So where did you get it from?

NS: We had an ice chest which kids today wouldn't know what an ice chest was. No, they used to sell wood and like they used to sell rabbits, you know, the rabbitohs, and clothes props. I remember they used to come 'round selling off the backs of the carts. No, it was mainly all wood.

SR: And were you ever sort of expected or go 'round with your mates in the neighbourhood sort of scrounging and collecting bottles and doing all that?

NS: Oh, we did all those things, yes, and sell them. I left school at a very early age. I was just under fifteen when I left school.

SR: How did you get away with that with your father and his education?

NS: Well, we didn't have the money to go on and I worked at Fox Movietone News for a short time, then the Vitoy(?) Biscuits had a biscuit factory just 'round the corner in Young Street Redfern and I was the office boy in there but you cooked on the oven, you did all sorts of things.

SR: Why did you leave Movietone?

NS: I was sacked.

SR: And why was that?

18.00 NS: I was there for two weeks and it was raining and I was expected to wash a car and I was a bit stubborn and I didn't so I got a job at Vitoy Biscuits and you could eat them too.

SR: Was your father disappointed that you weren't going on in school?

NS: I wasn't much good at school anyhow; it was probably a blessing. Oh, no. I can't recall if he was or he wasn't but actually I was bringing some money into the family which helped.

SR: When you were a kid, when you were selling the bottles or whatever, were you expected to give that money into the family or was that yours?

NS: Oh, we'd always help. We'd go to the pictures. Funny enough we didn't smoke very much in those days as kids – we had the odd smoke. I was caught smoking and got a belting. We were mostly interested in running and playing cricket in the street and I didn't play football till after I left school and we'd kick the ball 'round Moore Park or Redfern Park but we were having good, clean fun.

SR: What would be like a typical meal in your household?

NS: Well, for dinner you wouldn't just have one dish; you might have three or four dishes. That's just typical of a Lebanese family and the meals were always big and then they all seemed to go on diets afterwards sort of thing. We never went without food.

SR: Were you able to get Lebanese flatbread?

NS: Yes. The bakeries, the local bakeries used to make those.

SR: And they were Anglo bakeries.

NS: Oh, yes, but they knew the Lebanese community. Everyone knew everyone else – you could just go up to the bakery shop. I remember

when Joneses left the bakery there, old Bill Dury (?) was in there and he was there as an unregistered dentist and he made the best teeth that anyone could make. He was a Lebanese guy that couldn't speak English and didn't have a licence but used to make teeth.

20.09 **SR: Did your mother work?**

NS: No, she worked in the house. The women didn't go to work in those days.

SR: Can you describe a typical day of hers?

NS: My mother?

SR: Yes.

NS: My mother was very fortunate to have two very good girls. My sisters used to help mum a lot. My mother was spoilt. She used to smoke a lot - I think this is why we had the machine in the house. Mum, no, she cooked on occasions and I also had aunts close by. Mum was spoilt.

SR: As a male in a Lebanese household, did you contribute to any housework or anything or was that the female prerogative?

NS: Not much but I've made up for it since.

SR: And your father, would he have contributed in any way to housework?

NS: No, not really.

SR: In the evenings - like now everybody watches television - what did you do in the evenings in the family?

NS: See, the grandparents were a great influence on all families in those days and I think this is what's wrong today. The family network they were the whole unit. The grandparents were the centre of it and grandmother used to do a lot of things 'round the house and they all lived together, grandparents and parents after a later date.

SR: How many sets of grandparents were living with you?

NS: Only one. Well, they weren't living with us, they were living close by and we used to see a lot of each other but on odd occasions I'd go and sleep with my grandparents and we moved into the house after my grandfather died and my father became the clergyman because that was the church house.

22.04 The radio was always great for us – we had no television – and we'd go to the pictures and we'd go to the beach. I was a great one for scaling trams. I could even jump off backwards and we all learnt those things.

SR: And just hitched a ride?

NS: Oh, yes.

SR: And what beach would you go to?

NS: Down to Coogee or we'd go and swim at Centennial Park and I recall we'd be swimming there and when the trams went by we'd all jump out in the nude.

SR: I wanted to ask what brought your family from Lebanon. You know when your grandparents came in 1914, what was the motivator for them to immigrate then?

NS: I think my grandfather was under a threat. I think he was a naughty boy in his town in Lebanon and I think he and the patriarch had a falling out.

SR: On religious things?

NS: I think so. They tell all sorts of stories, the older Lebanese, on how wild my grandfather was. He was a big man and big hands and he was like a Don Camillo. You know, he'd walk down from the pulpit and smack somebody if they spoke in church and drink a bottle of whiskey and he was quite a wild guy but I think he was kicked out of Lebanon.

SR: And what about the rest of the community, what brought them? I just sort of interested in that immigration. Was it a wave then or a small wave? After the Middle East conflict this time we've have - - -

NS: Well, after World War II lots of Lebanese started to come. The immigration doors opened. You found that they were all looking for a new life but, as I say, he had no choice. He was sent out here and that's how our family came out. But the next generation were all educated but then since the war, the Lebanese War, lots of people came out from all walks of life and I don't know how many; there could be a hundred thousand Lebanese here now.

24.02 **SR: Who were your friends?**

NS: Then or now?

SR: Then and in Redfern. I'm talking about your childhood friends.

NS: I can remember Pat Keene(?) and George Horscroft(?) and Charlie Dixon(?), an Aboriginal boy, Onslow Lester(?), an Aboriginal boy, Mavis Dixon was an Aboriginal girl and she's over in the west and I happened to see her just recently. I had some great friends there. There was the Gaffneys(?) and it was just a close-knit - - -

SR: And what sort of families did they come from? What did their parents do for a living?

NS: Mostly all factory workers. Some may have been fitters and turners but they were mostly all factory workers. A lot worked at Steelbuilt and Wormalds which was 'round the corner or the glassworks.

SR: ACI?

NS: ACI, yes, a lot worked there.

SR: What sort of things did you do together?

NS: As kids?

SR: Yes.

NS: Well, as I said earlier, we'd race 'round the block.

SR: Did you have bikes?

NS: No. Nobody could afford a bike. We'd kick a ball around the park.

SR: Would you play mostly with boys or would you also play with girls?

NS: It didn't matter, boys and girls; the girls'd play with the boys. But we'd all go to the pictures together, the matinees, as I said, at the Redfern Empire. Then the arena opened, the sports arena opened when the bicycle was on, cycling, and we used to go up there; that was a big event.

SR: And watch cycling races?

NS: Bike races, yes. Then later on they had boxing up there and there were gymnasiums there. We used to go up the gym and box.

SR: Boxing. What else?

NS: Yes, a lot of that. Dick Kerr's Gym up in Baptist Street it was in Redfern. It helped a lot of us in our football days too, going up there and getting fit.

SR: What else would they have there aside from boxing?

26.02 NS: In the gymnasium?

SR: Yes.

NS: Well, nothing really. There was a club we called the Alleys(?) Club where we used to have a few dances and that was in Redfern Street Redfern near Ferriers(?), the hairdressers I can recall.

SR: Did you have much time for playing as children?

NS: Yes. Well, we'd go to school and then after school, half past three I think it was, by the time you got home it was four o'clock and you might go and have something to eat and then you'd go outside and then you'd play till about six o'clock and you'd go in for dinner and you stayed inside a lot.

SR: You played in the streets?

NS: Yes. Holidays, you couldn't have much holidays. There was no money to go away although I had an aunt that lived just outside of Windsor. Sometimes we'd go up there to the farm and spend a school holiday there.

SR: Can you remember any adventures that you had as kids? How far could you roam?

NS: Well, we'd roam anywhere, really; our parents wouldn't know.

SR: So where would you go?

NS: Well, as I said, we'd go to Coogee – Coogee was a favourite spot. We'd go and watch the cricket at the Cricket Ground. We'd sneak in there and there were always ways to get in there without paying and get on the hill. It's funny, now I'm chairman of the Cricket Ground I sit there and I used to watch the areas where I used to sit. But there was nothing that we were deprived of. We made our own fun. Moore Park was a great park, we used that. Then we'd go down to Coronation Playground which is in Prince Alfred Park when the playgrounds were formed which is a lot of activity and where the swimming pool is in Prince Alfred Park there was a building there, the Exhibition Building, and we used to go roller-skating which was a lot of fun. I was knocked over by cars three times and had a few injuries running across the street, trying to be smart.

28.08 **SR: And what sort of injuries did you sustain when you got hit by a car?**

NS: Nothing major. You know, dislocated collarbones and scratches and bruises and things.

SR: What was the medical treatment like in those days?

NS: South Sydney Hospital was great and we still go to South Sydney Hospital.

SR: Yes?

NS: It was all right. I never, ever stayed overnight but I survived.

SR: Were there any people that you had to avoid or you weren't allowed to mix with?

NS: Not really.

SR: I mean even older people or were there any characters who were sort of undesirable who were treated with a bit of suspicion by the neighbourhood?

NS: Well, there were guys in the area who had criminal records but they always respected as kids, they never interfered with us. We knew who the criminals were.

SR: Tell us about some of them.

NS: Well, I think that's all past history now, those guys. There might be some still alive, I don't know.

SR: Was there much crime or what sort of crime was it?

NS: None around us. Some of them were mixed up in sly grogging and petty thieving and all sorts of things, I suppose, in those days but not locally.

SR: Were there any SP bookies?

NS: Oh, yes, all the time, and I was a cockatoo for the two-up. We knew where the two-up was and we'd stand on the corner and we'd whistle if the police were coming down. Oh, yes, they were great days.

SR: I understand from talking to other people that usually the police raids were all arranged and organised.

NS: Oh, yes. They were all part of the family.

SR: Yes. Tell me about your school days. You went to Cleveland Street School.

NS: Yes. I went to Cleveland Street and then went to Crown Street and finished at Crown Street. And Miss Harker(?) was our kindergarten teacher who was a strict disciplinarian. She left an imprint, I think, on me; I always remembered her.

30.12 There's some good mates I had at school. A lot of us went from Cleveland Street to Crown Street which was secondary and I used to walk with Fred Solomon, I remember, each day. He lived up the road and we'd walk and we'd have competitions, nobody could speak from here to there and so on. He later finished up dead in New York which was rather sad – he was in the Canadian Air Force. It's a pity I don't see many of my old schoolmates but when I do it's very exciting. I saw one just several weeks just purely by accident. It was great and it's always nice. I like to go back to my old roots. I just loved Redfern.

SR: You said you didn't like school. Were there many Aboriginal families in Redfern?

NS: Yes. There wasn't the Eveleigh Street in those days where it is today and a lot of them went to Cleveland Street School and they were just great citizens. Nobody took any notice if you were Aboriginal or Lebanese and the only differences I used to find was if I took something different in food to school people would look because in those days if you didn't have corned beef and potatoes or steak and eggs you were different but society's changed now. The Lebanese food people used to shun their nose at it because, as I say, it wasn't the traditional Anglos.

SR: Were there enclaves in Redfern or was the community integrated? Like did you have all the Lebanese bunched around one area and, say, the Aboriginal people in another area or were people sort of fairly well scattered and integrated rather than sort of having – I don't know, *ghetto's* not the right word but, you know.

32.14 NS: No, I think they were fairly scattered but what you found was the Lebanese arrived off a ship. They'd go there and see that somebody was living there, they'd try and live because they could identify and talk to them. But, no, there were no ghettos to that extent, no.

SR: And were people mixing, like the Lebanese and the Aboriginal people and the Anglos? Were there Greeks and Italians?

NS: I don't remember many Greeks and Italians. All I can remember is the Lebanese and the Anglos there.

SR: And people, would you go to their houses? Was there a mixing and coming and going from each other's houses and playing together?

NS: Oh, yes, oh, yes, none of that problem. As I say, kids don't know black from white. We were all just kids together.

SR: And you don't remember ever being called a wog or anything like that?

NS: Oh, yes. Well, yes, I've been called all those things. Especially later in my football years I was called a black bastard and a wog, I've been called that, but, you know, by experts, not even here, even overseas.

SR: But as kids, did you experience that kind of thing as a child?

NS: No, no, not really, no, because we were Anglicised really. I was born in this country and I'd be dressing the same although I didn't have shoes – a lot of us didn't have shoes, you know, on the barefoot days.

SR: Were you welcome in Anglo households?

NS: Yes, oh, yes. I think so; I don't think I was ever thrown out.

SR: Was there a large Aboriginal community in Redfern at that time?

NS: Not as you experience today, no, no.

SR: Got any idea of numbers?

NS: I wouldn't, I wouldn't because we went into Waterloo. I don't recall any Aboriginals in Surry Hills. I think they were all 'round Redfern and I didn't know much about the Lawson Street end up there, how many were living up there in those days because we all stuck to our end down where we are.

34.17 **SR: You know how you said you'd roam around. Was there any sort of social divisions in terms of suburbs? Like was Redfern considered to be better or worse than say Waterloo or Alexandria or Surry Hills and were there any divisions say like between kids? I've heard from other interviews people talking about the Newtown kids having wars with the Redfern kids - I mean not really serious.**

NS: We'd play them sport. It wasn't much. We used to go down to play with Bernie Purcell and the crowd down towards the Moore Park end but, no, no, it was just all good fun. There were no gangs, I don't recall any gangs that'd hunt around. There were no bashings, I don't recall

any bashings. I recall the odd street fights and I've been in them myself but it's one to one but I don't recall gangs.

SR: And can you remember anything about the social status of the different sort of suburbs or what did the Redfern mob think of the Waterloo crowd sort of thing?

NS: Well, the social status came in when we went out of our district. You know, if you went to Bondi or Vaucluse or Woollahra or North Shore we were all different because we never had gear. I remember the Kahn boys – Keith Kahn now is a doctor in Wollongong – and Bobby Dyad(?) and they became well educated from there but they were pretty tough boys and Joe Correy who later became the professor of gynaecology and obstetrics in Hobart is an old Redfern boy.

36.08

And I can remember Johnnie Wade was a great singer and Johnnie's still alive and he lived in William Street and Joe Correy and I used to hold a hat for him outside the pubs when he was singing - there was more of that interactivity.

SR: It sounds like you were mostly based in Redfern, really, and that was your core.

NS: We had no money to go anywhere else you walked; nobody had a car.

SR: Did you ever go into the city to, say, mess around the Botanical Gardens or Art Gallery or anything?

NS: No, no, no, no, no. Moore Park or Prince Alfred Park or Redfern Park. There were lots of Indians also in Elizabeth Street Redfern – they had wholesale food and things.

SR: And did they mix in or were they a separate community?

NS: I don't remember any Indian kids mixing; they were much older, I recall, at that time.

SR: What were the big events of your childhood?

NS: The day I was born.

SR: Yes. And after that?

NS: Childhood up to what age?

SR: I don't know, fourteen or fifteen. Like in the year say was Cracker Night big for you?

NS: Yes, Empire Day was great.

SR: But what did you do on Empire Day?

NS: Let off crackers. We'd all march up to Redfern Empire Theatre and we'd sing 'Land of Hope and Glory' and 'God Save the Queen'.

SR: Was this organised by the school?

NS: Yes. We'd march up there and then we'd have a half-day holiday. Then we might go down the park and have a run 'round but holidays, as I say we couldn't afford to go away but if you did it was always great to go to one of your relations in the country. I can never, ever recall having a holiday in a holiday resort. I envied everyone that used to go to Nambucca Heads. That's a place I always used to hear is kids went to Nambucca Heads.

38.10 **SR: Local kids?**

NS: Yes, for holidays.

SR: And you would go to your aunt's?

NS: Yes, because we couldn't afford to go to anywhere.

SR: Where was she at?

NS: Glossodia, which is just out of Windsor.

SR: She had a farm?

NS: Yes. Actually, I went to school there for about three or four months and I got expelled.

SR: Why?

NS: I don't know. I think I played up or something, I don't know.

SR: And you were sent to live with her for a little while?

NS: Yes, yes. And I might have been there for about six months.

SR: Why were you sent to live with her?

NS: Oh, to give my parents a break, I suppose.

SR: How old were you?

NS: I must have been about twelve, I suppose.

SR: Had you been a bit of a ratbag at that time?

NS: I was a ratbag – I haven't changed.

SR: Were there places that you were not allowed to go as a kid? You sound like you had a pretty free sort of - - -

NS: Yes. Well, I mean we weren't allowed to go into pubs but we never wanted to in those days. I don't think anyone had a girlfriend. Sex never came into it, I don't think.

SR: Did you have any sex education?

NS: No, no, still haven't.

SR: Can you remember the circus going to Redfern?

NS: Yes. The circuses, that was always a big event - the Show was always a big event too when the Show was on because we could walk over to the Showground in those days – but the circuses were good and a lot of fun and I'd say it was different. But we used to like to going to the pictures and theatres but, as I say, mainly we used to play games by running 'round the block.

40.01 **SR: You mentioned to me before about a women's football team. What was that?**

NS: Yes. There was a women's New South Wales team and there were two ladies from Redfern.

SR: What year are we talking?

NS: I just can't remember but I have seen a photograph in recent years. I mean Eileen Matta(?) – that was her name before she was married – and Kitty Cohen(?) before she was married. Kitty was on the wing and she's still a mad Souths supporter and Eileen was the hooker and Eileen had the photograph of her eightieth birthday a couple of years ago when I was there and Kitty married the Gaffneys who were very well-known and very mixed up in racing circles as well. Kitty still lives in Redfern – I think she lives in Young Street now.

SR: So we're talking probably this women's football team, the '30s or '40s?

NS: It'd be the '30s, yes, it'd be the '30s.

SR: And was South Sydney Football Club in existence then?

NS: Yes, it was great. We were all mad Souths supporters and still are, I think.

SR: Your father was?

NS: No, no. My father, as I said earlier, he wasn't interested in sport till I took it up but Souths, we just loved all the Souths players in those days; we'd go and watch Souths play.

SR: All the kids?

NS: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: Was there much industry in that area?

NS: Yes, there was a lot of industry in that area. There was engineering works, there was a glassworks, Claude Neons were there, I recall Anthony Horderns were there. There was a mixture of industry.

SR: If you had to physically describe Redfern say in the '30s, the earliest you could probably go back to, what sort of images come to your mind?

NS: That it was a great place to live, it was very central, it was a place where nobody had any more than the next person. I find it's changed tremendously now. We didn't have Housing Commission buildings in those days. That brought an influx of a lot of people into a smaller area and there's still some great homes in Redfern.

42.18 Pitt Street Redfern is still a great street, I think, with the glorious homes there. I think it's more middle class now than it's ever been. The whole scene has changed. It became trendy, I think which is sad because it forced a lot of the older people out of the area; they couldn't afford to live there. Prices kept going up and up and people were forced out of their own homes; it was very sad.

SR: Would you describe it as a safe neighbourhood?

NS: Then?

SR: Yes.

NS: Very safe. I recall when I was first selected to go to England with the football and the people of Redfern gave me a farewell at the Redfern Town Hall and Johnnie Wade was the compere and he had Harry Willis and Glen Marks(?) and they were the group that played and sang at the Prince Edward Theatre in town. And they had this big function at Redfern Town Hall and I remember Johnnie Wade saying "This is a fun night. Everyone leave the hardware outside" - the guns and the knives were left outside. And they gave me a beautiful rug that I took away and I always feel proud of that day.

SR: Yes. But it's amazing that the people were carrying hardware in a way.

NS: Oh, yes, but that happened.

SR: Yes. Were the razor gangs there? I think they were in Surry Hills.

NS: They were virtually in Surry Hills, yes, yes.

SR: Do you know what they were?

NS: The razor gangs? No, not really but I think the only people they attacked were probably people that did the wrong thing by them.

44.05 **SR: Do you think that the times were more dangerous? I mean in terms of people didn't wear seatbelts and scaling trams and industrial accidents – there wasn't the Occupational Health & Safety stuff.**

NS: But we didn't have the number of cars on the road, any of that. I don't think we had the long hair where people would get them caught in machines and all sorts of things. We've become more sophisticated. Now, whether that's a good thing or not I don't know. I just think they were the great days.

SR: You don't remember people being hurt, though, like neighbours or kids' fathers being hurt at work?

NS: I don't recall but no doubt that did happen on odd occasions. I don't recall that.

SR: What smells can you remember?

NS: Around Redfern. Well, Harry Anthony had his local stables up the road and we used to go in there. You know, you'd smell the horse manure. I used to love the smell out of Jonsies Bakery; that was good.

SR: Did you ever get a chance to ride the horses in the stables that were around there?

NS: Well, you'd get in the sulky or in the old dray. As I say, it was a great time to grow up.

SR: Can you remember any local characters?

NS: Oh, many. Larry Gaffney was the best street fighter I'd ever seen and Tommy Caldo(?) was a good street fighter and Jakey(?) Solomon. Jakey Solomon, his father had a manufacturing place there and Jakey had no teeth in the front, he was a toilet attendant down the markets,

always wore a beanie with South Sydney colours on and Jakey was just out to help everyone, he was just a beautiful guy. I think he used to drink about fifty six schooners a day and he was one of the legends around Redfern.

46.12 **SR: Was he older than you?**

NS: Oh, much, yes. Jakey died, could have been in the last ten years. And I recall when I was Lord Mayor [of City of Sydney] John Laws and I used to go down to the markets at 6.00am of a morning and sit down just to talk to Jakey and, yes, he's just a beautiful guy. Never asked for a thing for himself, always wanted to help somebody else and he was just a loveable character. And when his family moved out of there to Drummoyne – his brother was a solicitor – they're all dead now – and Jakey still stayed in Redfern, worked the garbage trucks and worked as a toilet attendant. He used to be the 'MLA' [Member of the Legislative Assembly]; he used it to refer to "men's lavatory attendant".

SR: And where did most people shop?

NS: The corner shop where the City Mission is now on the corner there. There was a corner shop there, that's all, and it was always on tick as they used to say in those days, you know, you'd pay later. And a butcher was across the road - it was old Harry. They were really great.

SR: What sounds do you associate with Redfern, say in the '30s?

NS: Sounds, I don't identify with any sounds.

SR: What are some other characters? You named Jakey. What are some other characters from that area that were just identities around Redfern in the '30s?

NS: Well, as I said there was those other guys that I mentioned earlier.

SR: What made them characters?

NS: They were tough, tough guys, you know, you wouldn't look at them sideways. And Bluey Cotter (?) and Billie Waters was a great street fighter and Sammie Batson and those guys they were all good people if you left them alone.

48.14 **SR: What can you remember about the police?**

NS: The police would just order us away from the corner. They didn't like us loitering around the corner and they'd accuse you of doing things which we weren't doing. We were doing no harm. We had nowhere to

go; we were just down there, talking. In those days they'd give you a kick on the backside and send you on and that was all.

SR: What's your happiest memory?

NS: In Redfern? I guess the people just made me happy. As I say, I still go back to Redfern now but it's changed. It makes you sound a bit nostalgic but I was at funeral recently and I went down the other corner and had a look and started to think of all the good old days of Redfern. The happiest is remembering some of the people there. They were just nice people, they really were.

SR: What's your saddest memory?

NS: I think when we had to move from there because it was a big wrench in those days: the Housing Commission come and knocked down your place.

SR: Did they put the big flats up?

NS: Yes. And we fought, we didn't want to go and it was a traumatic experience for a lot of those people to move away from an environment they'd all been used to and some of them weren't young and it was very sad.

SR: Your most vivid memory?

NS: Of Redfern? I don't know. Redfern Park, I get a big nostalgic when I pass Redfern Park and my wife who came down from the country lived in Redfern when she went to school there so we identify a lot, both she and I.

50.03 **SR: What was the most looked forward time of year, what time of the year did you look forward to most as a kid?**

NS: Holidays, holiday-time, Christmastime when the boys could go down the beach together or go to Centennial Park. As I said earlier, I would go and run 'round the park. As I say, I didn't like school very much and I wasn't much good.

SR: Is there anything that I haven't asked that I should have?

NS: About Redfern?

SR: Yes.

NS: I don't know. As I say, it's all from the top of my head.

SR: Were there any great adventures that you had or times that particularly stand out?

NS: No, because as I say we were all restricted because of lack of monies so an adventure was going to the pictures or something.

SR: Did you go often to the pictures?

NS: Once a week or, you know, you'd go and watch Souths play football or something. No, there's not much you could do; you made your own fun. You'd sit there by the radio and I used to hear the stories. I think *Blue Hills* was still on in those days or something.

SR: Did you play with your sisters much?

NS: Not very much, no. They had their own girlfriends.

SR: Did they have to stay home a lot?

NS: Well, not a matter of "stay home a lot". They weren't allowed out at night and they all helped around the house. And my brother's about six years younger than me so we were different, we had altogether different friends.

SR: And did you bring kids home a lot to your family house?

NS: Oh, yes, many times, yes. And even in my twenties more so I used to bring people home.

SR: They'd stay for meals?

NS: Oh, yes, yes.

52.00 **SR: A bit of an open house?**

NS: Always, always an open house. As I say, I don't ever recall having the front door - - -

Interview ends