

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

‘Millers Point Oral History Project’

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Russell Taylor**

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INTERVIEWER: Frank HEIMANS

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00:02 START OF TAPE MP-FH12 SIDE A

00:03 Tape Identification

While we are on the subjects of acknowledgements I'd like to make an acknowledgement to the traditional owners of this land which would be the Cammeraygal People, because we are in Cremorne. Right Russell could you tell me your full name.

Russell Charles Taylor.

Tell me where and when you were born.

00:46 Born on 12 March 1948 in Sydney at Paddington Women's Hospital and at that time of my birth my mum and dad were both living in 14 Trinity Avenue, Millers Point.

So you went home after the hospital to live there, grew up in Trinity Avenue?

01:15 Yes, my brother and I - I had an elder brother, James, who has now passed away, he was three years older than me. Just a little bit of background: my mum and dad came to live at Millers Point as a result of my grandmother, my father's mother, moving from Redfern to Millers Point, given access to public housing. At that time the landlord was the Maritime Services Board but she was able to get a house at 41 Kent Street, Millers Point some years prior to my birth. Then of course my mother and father got married at a young age, they moved into Kent Street and then when my brother was born they moved from Kent Street around to Trinity Avenue where we had our own family home. So out of my grandmother's house in Kent Street around to their own home in Trinity Avenue.

How would you describe your mother and father?

02:13 Well, my dad was an Aboriginal fellow, raised at La Perouse, although his tribal affiliations, his ancestral country, was up in the New England part of New South Wales, he was a Kamillaroy man, very proud Kamillaroy man. My grandmother came from a place called Caroonna, an Aboriginal Reserve up near Kuringai and my grandmother moved down to Sydney as a very young girl in her mid-teens and she actually gave birth to my father and he was raised in La Perouse.

02:54 In terms of my mum and dad, they were both working-class people, worked very hard all their life. My dad was a tradesman, he was a painter and interior decorator, but he was one of these fellows that could do anything to do with building, carpentry, whatever. At various times he worked on the waterfront, as well as worked for himself as a subcontractor, trying to get work all over the place, painting houses et cetera, et cetera. Later in life my dad became a

watchman on the waterfront and for the last ten years of his working life he worked as a watchman on the waterfront and he eventually retired from the waterfront as a watchman. I guess I was very lucky - whilst we weren't very affluent we didn't go without, mum and dad always made sure we had enough to eat.

03:51 My dad was an interesting person, he was a professional fighter in his youth until he was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight when he retired. Interestingly enough my dad wasn't a drinker up until his late twenties, when he retired from boxing but he made up for it and I can say to you during parts of his life, his early life certainly, he had problems with the drink but we managed to overcome that and it doesn't detract from my relationship with him and my love of my mum and dad, but it certainly caused a few problems during his lifetime and my relationship with my mum and dad.

04:36 My mum came from a very large family, they also were Redfern people, married my dad at a very, very young age, I think they were boyfriend and girlfriend in their early teens and they married when my mother was sixteen and my dad was eighteen. My brother was born and I was born, I think my mum was nineteen or twenty when I was born. So they were a young married couple, young parents, struggled most of their working lives but did their best to make sure that my brother and I didn't go without too much and were very supportive parents.

05:19 I have to say also that I think they really enjoyed living in Millers Point, it was an interesting place to live. I have said this in other discussions but one of the things I guess.... most people on Millers Point at that time.....I was born in 1948 and I was raised in the 1950s and 1960s in Millers Point, left probably to make my own life in the late 1960s. When I was about seventeen or eighteen I left home and although I didn't live on Millers Point until quite later I always considered there was that strong sense of home, strong sense of that is where I belong.

06:08 I mean in terms of some of the issues in terms of my family certainly both my dad and my grandmother were well regarded by the community. My grandmother, who lived in Kent Street was universally known as Aunt Mary, everybody that knew her, whether they were old, young, or whatever referred to her as Aunt Mary. We were aware of our Aboriginality, and my dad and my family's Aboriginality and I think I have said this before, that whilst that was an issue

there were many other issues as well that had to do with religion, politics, not just the sort of racial issues that we had to deal with.

Were there any racial issues?

06:54 Yes there were. You are talking of a community that was very much Euro-centric, not even European, British really, British-Celtic background, Irish, Scots and Pommies were the main heritage in terms of Millers Point. Millers Point as you know, most of the housing there when I was a baby and then growing up was public housing, was created to provide low affordable accommodation for the waterfront workforce, and that workforce consisted of people that worked as wharfies, stevedores on the waterfront, worked on the tugs, merchant seamen and all the auxiliary services that go to having a competitive maritime industry. So most of the people that lived in Millers Point somehow or other were associated with the maritime industries and of course most of those people, as I say, came from a sort of Celtic-British background, rather than European.

08:07 Certainly there were racial issues there, where it is a question, I guess, of difference, a question of stereotypical type responses, et cetera. Whilst my Aboriginality and my family's Aboriginality were never an issue we went to war on it was always something that was raised, particularly in the heat of battle - if you had an argument with somebody or whatever, you could always expect some insult to do with our being blackfellows, etcetera, but that is not to say that there weren't many other types of insults that didn't have to do with race.

08:47 So there were racial issues there, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s where the migration generally was increasing and a good thing too, where the skill shortages and all the rest of it demanded that we improve or immigration inflows. I have to say that I probably wasn't conscious of it as a young boy but probably later in life I appreciated the impact, although it was great, I don't think, to Millers Point particularly. Over time there is no doubt that the waterfront - you've only got to look at the makeup of some of the waterfront now, the gangs of wharfies, where previously they'd be all white Australians over time they took on a different composition, including Italians and Greeks, Maltese and so on, taking the European influences and of course more recently Asian. So although that was starting to happen when I was a boy I am not sure I was that conscious of it. There were certainly the black/white issues, no doubt about that.

Well as there are many other political issues we will get on to that later. Now do you or your family

associate yourselves with any Aboriginal tribal groups?

10:06 Yes, my dad, myself and my brother and my grandmother, not so much my mum, we identify as Kamillaroy People and those people, as I say, come from the New England part of New South Wales, around Tamworth, Moree, around that part of the country. As I say, my dad, even though he died a loyal Millers Point person he always talked about back home as being the land, the tribal lands of the Kamillaroy. My grandmother didn't have the language but she certainly knew many Kamillaroy words and used them from time-to-time, though she didn't speak it fluently. I think during her life because she hadn't used the language she had lost it but there were many words, particularly swear words, from time-to-time that she would use and I would identify and I knew what they were but maybe nobody else did. My brother and I and my father, it was a bit of an in-joke in terms of some of the language that we used.

11:09 I guess we are all victims of our time too. The policy of the day in those days was integration, no question about that, and assimilation and the attitude of the mainstream wider community was if you didn't assimilate well there was something wrong with you. So we were sort of that part thatwhere I know my dad, whilst I think he was very proud of his tribal affiliations there is no doubt in order to get work, in order to continue to get work we assimilated in most characteristics and most aspects of our life. I guess from my dad's point of view particularly, some of it was necessary in order to make sure he could get work and therefore feed the family, pay the rent and all the rest of it.

Now do you remember the Referendum of 1967?

12:10 It is funny, I was eighteen or nineteen at the time and I do remember it, but I have to say it probably was another ten or twenty years before the significance of it dawned and the reason is nothing much changed. I know it was a landmark decision and in terms of a referendum the one that has been carried with the most majority and all that, so it was historic. We felt at the time it would address and redress things that needed to be addressed and it is debatable as to whether that has been the case but that is not the purpose of this interview. Yes, I do remember it but the significance of it didn't hit me until much later in life.

Did it make any difference to your family?

13:02 No, none whatsoever. In that context people misguidedly say it is when blackfellows got the vote, well quite frankly it was nothing to do with it, it was about the shifting of powers between State and Commonwealth governments. I have to say in terms of the Taylor family at

Trinity Avenue it really had no impact, not to say it wasn't a significant development. As I say, I think the significance really didn't hit me until later in life.

Some Aboriginal families actually fought in the Second World War - did your family?

13:43 My Uncle Jim Quinn, whom I mentioned to you, the family that lived at Millers Point, they were our cousins and their family lived in Millers Point. They moved out when I was three or four years old, I don't remember them living in Millers Point although I was aware that they did and they moved to Ryde. My uncle actually got a Soldier Settlement, a war service loan, to get the house and he was a blackfellow from Narrromine. My dad, although he didn't see any action he was in the Air Force during the war. We were aware of many, many extended family members, not so much from Sydney but certainly from up Tamworth way that were in the armed forces.

14:33 It is an interesting issue that even during times when we weren't able to vote and weren't really counted in the census as citizens there were certainly plenty of them in the army and plenty of them fighting for Australia. Many of them, of course, suffered the indignity of coming back and not being able to join the local RSL club because they were a blackfellow and I know many incidences of that., where they were absolutely excluded and not only excluded but evicted from the club premises and yet those same blokes fought alongside their colleagues. That is one of the tragedies, one of the injustices, Aboriginal people suffered as a consequence of fighting for their country.

That is terrible. Now do you know anything about the Aboriginal occupation of Millers Point before the white man came?

15:27 In terms of the cultural history of Sydney I don't want to make claims of having any first-hand involvement or appreciation of Aboriginal history. I think certainly by the time I was a young fellow and growing up there most of the physical signs of Aboriginal occupation had gone, or if they were still there they had certainly been built upon or covered up in some way. For instance rock art, middens, et cetera, normal signs of occupation - there weren't any of those that I am aware of. Of course the whole waterfront had been done over many, many times, including some major engineering development of some consequence in the early 1900s. But I am aware that certainly there is no doubt that there would have been at Millers Point, particularly given its proximity to the harbour and the food and all the rest of it that has to do with salt water people, it would have been a great food basin, I guess, and a sheltered one at

that. To the east of the harbour it is not so sheltered, whereas places around Dawes Point, Walsh Bay, Darling Harbour is quite sheltered compared to some other places, so it would have certainly been utilised to the maximum by Aboriginal groups as a food source, as a source of ceremony, as a camping area, no question about that.

17:01 The dilemma, I guess, for Aboriginal history - probably The Rocks and surrounds, Millers Point and surrounds, I apologise for using the term in the same context because they are different places and you and I have spoken about this - Millers Point and The Rocks area was probably one of the first areas affected by European settlement so it would have been one of the first areas where blackfellows would have been dispossessed and excluded. As you can appreciate if it is a good source of food to blackfellows, it is also a good source of food to white fellows and not necessarily in the sharing mode. Sydney, as you know was decimated by disease as well as by dispossession, warfare, discrimination to the point where the Aboriginal population was, within less than fifty years, almost non-existent. There were pockets like La Perouse and others where Aboriginal people had been shifted to as a means of getting of them out of sight and out of the way. Millers Point would have been one of the first battlegrounds where that happened.

18:12 Then of course Millers Point was densely populated in terms of the residential development and quasi-government public sector development taking place, as well as of course being a very, very important port area, as was the whole harbour, but particularly around Darling Harbour, Dawes Point, Walsh Bay, etcetera, a really important port area and very busy.

Which has marked its character, really.

18:40 That is where you get the development of a densely populated area, mix it with the outcomes of regular visitations from sailors and seamen from all over the world that need to have R&R facilities for those sort of people, including boarding houses, brothels, pubs, all of the things that seamen and others enjoy. Of course, as you probably know The Rocks and Millers Point at different times had almost a pub on every corner, I am not quite sure how many but they certainly had a lot of them, and they were all very busy from what I understand.

19:29 I must say when I was a young fellow, I mean a baby between probably five and fifteen, so growing up in that period, certainly I can vividly remember at that time all of the pubs were

busy, they were all full most of the time. They were scenes of all sorts of interesting activity, including violence, and violence not only just between locals who maybe had had too much to drink from time-to-time but also between the visiting seamen, particularly Pommies, British seamen, and the locals who always wanted to try and work out who was the strongest and who was the best drinkers and who was the best fighters. We regularly as kids witnessed that, it was part of our entertainment. Regularly, if you sat outside one of the busier pubs of a Friday or a Saturday night you could be assured that you'd see a few interesting fights, there was always entertainment going on.

I believe you have even seen a murder outside a pub, have you?

20:32 I have got to be careful here, I didn't see murder but I know there was more than quite a few. I recall, I think I mentioned to you, where a very good friend of my father's was shot in one of the hotels, I think that was a domestic dispute but nevertheless it ended up in the death of a young man who was shot dead. There have been various other incidents. I know a fellow was shot outside another hotel, it was supposed to be an assassination. I have heard of various near-death bashings and very serious injuries as a result of bashings. I have lost a few friends but that is through drug abuse and all that sort of stuff. Sadly, like everywhere now Millers Point has certainly gone through that at different times and probably still going on where drugs are a real problem there.

Millers Point I get the feeling isn't really such a violent place.

21:36 I think it is gentrified, I don't doubt that. That was why I was a bit cautious, I don't want to give it a bad name, but certainly in my time it was a tough neighbourhood. There are areas like Surry Hills, Woolloomooloo, Pyrmont, Glebe, Millers Point, where you knew I wouldn't say gangs but there were alliances of people that lived in those areas that were prone to violence, no question about that. Usually a lot of petty crime, and some not so petty crime going on. If you went even for a visit in some of those areas you could expect to have some sort of confrontation, the same if you came to Millers Point.

22:19 I mean, going into the early days of Millers Point - as you know The Rocks Push was infamous, where not just petty crimes but very serious crimes, including murder were a feature of what used to go on every weekend, almost. I wouldn't say it was as bad as that in my time but I would have to say that there were some very, very, very colourful characters in my time. What some people would call colourful racing identities, whichever way you look at it they

were criminals and they were career criminals, serious criminals. Some of those people were looked up to in the community, they were considered to be achievers.

One of the elements of Millers Point when I was a young fellow was that there was always this demarcation line between the community and the police, it wasn't a friendly relationship.

Some of those colourful characters might not be around any more - can you name any of them?

23:20 I have got to be careful here. I maybe prefer not to, some of them are still around and maybe I had better not because once you start naming one or two. All I can say there is no doubt - there were career criminals, whether it be in waterfront-related pilfering in a serious way, or SP bookmaking, or whatever.

I believe you have a little experience yourself as an SP bookie.

23:57 I have got to be careful here. As a young fellow I always thought SP bookmaking was a way to get very rich very quickly, so myself and a couple of friends, we had some very unsuccessful attempts at setting up SP bookmaking. Without saying too much it sort of came to an end when I got arrested at one stage and went to court, I thought that was it, I wouldn't do that again.

Which hotel was it?

24:29 I was actually arrested at the Harbourview Hotel. When I look back it was quite obvious, it was a copper but in those days I didn't have the bloody brains to just to leave, I thought I was pretty smart. I must say SP bookmaking from the community point of view was considered to be a legitimate occupation and apart from a protest against authority it was a legitimate occupation. Everybody on Millers Point had an interest in the races, whether they be the thoroughbreds, the greyhounds or the trots. In fact there were quite a few people that trained greyhounds that lived at Millers Point, so there was this ongoing in gambling in the sport of kings.

25:23 In every pub, and as I said there were quite a few pubs in Millers Point, there was an SP bookmaker and there were some that were based in some of the houses. Just to give you a bit of an idea, there was one in Merriman Street, there was one in Windmill Street, there was one in Cumberland Street, there was one in Kent Street. You had a choice and I can well remember taking my grandmother's bets around with a little note and there'd be a twenty cent piece wrapped up in the note and she'd have all her threepenny bets written out and I'd take them

to the SP bookmaker and deliver those. Then I'd go back home and if she had any results I would have to go back and collect it for her. That was the done thing, it has gone now, of course, the TAB has put paid to that and made it legal to bet off-course, but it was all about that. Your champions, such as Tulloch and Phar Lap and all that sort of thing, people from Millers Point, they were their greatest supporters and they loved that industry and I suggest they still do and probably can bet legally now on the TAB.

26:35 I think it is a feature in general of working-class people that they have the love of those sort of sports, it is an opportunity also of course to win some money. There is always that reward, if you like, that you might strike it rich. Same with the lotteries. I well remember my grandmother and my mum doing it, and still do.

I believe the pubs were more than just hotels, they were more like support systems.

27:06 Most of the pubs - I am talking now about pubs like the Hero of Waterloo, the Palisade, Captain Cook, the Harbourview, all at different times had their regulars and all at different times had their own social clubs or activities that would regularly involve some sort of social get-togethers. Might be a dance, might be an outing, might be a ferry cruise or whatever, and they were very solidly supported by the locals of Millers Point and people from The Rocks as well, where you had your regulars and you were sort of identified by which pub you actually were associated with.

27:50 We lived across the road from the Hero of Waterloo, so my dad was well-known in that place but also the Harbourview. So it changed over time, where you'd switch allegiances for whatever reason. They'd get a new publican and all of a sudden there'd be this changing of the guard as to which local you supported and they still continue to do so. Even when I later in life had a business on Millers Point for a couple of years and I tried to reinvigorate the Millers Point football team the basis for that was both the Captain Cook Hotel and the Palisade Hotel who strongly supported the football sides. So in terms of that sporting activity they were the hub, that is where you went to talk, that is where you went to have a drink, it is where you went to have your meetings, if you had some sort of committee that is where you went to meet. After the game you'd go back to the pub and have some sort of post-mortem as to why you got beaten and that sort of stuff. I am sure that has been the case at Millers Point almost from day one, from the time the pubs first opened, that it has provided some sort of social

basis and linkage to the community.

29:06 I don't want to give the wrong impression: not everybody in Millers Point are drinkers, I know many of my friends and their parents, where the dad might enjoy a drink but of course the mother didn't. It is not just the fact that you get a drink there it was the fact that it was a physical basis for people to come together and meet and either have a sing-song or whatever it might be and that is a very important role. I think probably one or two of the pubs still provide that for a smaller number of people now.

29:46 END OF TAPE MP-FH12 SIDE A

29:47 START OF TAPE MP-FH12 SIDE B

Were the ladies allowed to drink in the main lounge?

29:56 When I was a young fellow I well remember most pubs had ladies' lounges and it just wasn't done to see women in a public bar, that was a men's only domain. If there was a woman in there they were usually considered to be not a very nice woman and somehow or other lacking in ethics or standards, or whatever. For instance, I can remember my mum who wasn't a big drinker but she enjoyed a drink, she'd go to the ladies' parlour and dad would bring out a small shandy or whatever, and us kids would sit down. It depends which pub you are talking about but most pubs had their ladies' lounges and that is a segregation that continued right up until probably the 1970s, might even be before that. Certainly I can remember it quite vividly.

30:58 I think up until the 1960s they had the six o'clock closing and I only vaguely remember this, I don't say I have some vivid memories. The relaxation of those trading laws, where pubs were able to open until ten o'clock was a dramatic change across the nation, probably, certainly across the city, I think it had a major impact in Millers Point. It wasn't necessarily a positive one because what used to happen there, the men who were mainly waterside workers finished work and they'd go to the pub and they'd know they could drink until six. You'd have what they used to call the six o'clock swill, which would mean you could drink as much as you like but at six o'clock you had to stop, but then they'd go and have tea and sit down with their

families. Have dinner, have tea, have some family quality time. I am only assuming this to a great degree but I suggest that once that stopped and they didn't have to go home at six o'clock it meant there wasn't as much family harmony and family time spent together as there should have been for many of the families, not for all of them but for quite a few. All of a sudden they could stay until ten o'clock. Now any impact from that I really don't know, I could be talking through my hat, but I suspect it was a major change.

Now tell me a little bit about your schooling at Millers Point.

32:26 Well I must say my schooling memories are very, very fond. Having said that I always regret the fact that I left schooling at Millers Point too early. By that I mean I went to Lance Kindergarten in High Street, like many of my mates, then I went to Fort Street Primary School. But in fourth class I was asked to go to an Opportunity Class at Summer Hill, so I was ripped out of a place that I knew with all my mates, friends, girls and boys, and as a young kid in fifth class, nine or ten, or eleven, I had to travel from Millers Point to Summer Hill everyday for two years to go to school. I didn't mind that to some extent but I always regretted the fact that I wasn't with my mates. I don't think I suffered greatly from it but I did regret that I didn't share those last couple of years in primary school with my mates, people that I'd grown up with and people who I am still friends with.

33:44 From Summer Hill in fifth and sixth (class) I went to Fort Street Boys' High and I was very pleased about that. Although, funnily enough, I actually applied to go to Cleveland Street where my father and my brother had both gone to school and where many of my friends who were in the same year, although back at Millers Point, were going to Cleveland Street from Millers Point, most of them, actually.

34:08 They either went to two schools from Fort Street Primary, I may have this wrong, it seems to me they either went to Cleveland Street, I'm talking about the boys now, or they went to Rosehill in Balmain and most of them went to Cleveland Street. That is where I wanted to go for a whole range of reasons because I was going to be reunited with my mates, but it never happened because I went to Fort Street. I don't regret that because I made plenty of good friends and I enjoyed my schooling.

34:35 Fort Street Primary, in those days I think was a very, very good school, I don't know how many kids went there but there was a lot, every class was full. I think they had some very

good teachers there, mind you I think we were a pretty difficult bunch generally. They had regular canings at that school, I remember vividly getting the cane on a number of occasions and I remember many, many, many of my mates getting the cane. Mostly boys, I never ever saw a girl getting the cane. I don't know what the punishment for the girls was but it certainly wasn't caning or detention. Like every school we had our tyrants as teachers and we had some good teachers. I really enjoyed it, we'd do most things the school organised, such as plays and cantatas, sports days, swimming carnivals, all the things that you do, in my view it was a healthy range of activities. I think the academic standard was pretty good, in fact I know it was. The reason I know that is because I was a reasonable student but I know particularly one or two of the girls were brilliant students and they went on in life to show that, so the academic standard was pretty good.

Now Russ, were there any other Aboriginal families living in Millers Point while you were there?

35:55 Not that I am aware of. The only other ones are as I say my own family, the Quinns, but they left Millers Point between the time I was born and the time I started going to school, I am not sure of the exact year - I must ask my mother actually, to get it right. So the answer to my knowledge is no. That is not to say people may or may not have wanted to identify. I certainly don't remember any in terms of black kids running around, there was no others. As I say, my brother and myself are the only ones that I am aware of that got insulted, or whatever, from time-to-time, kids fight as you know. So the answer is no, but that is not to say there wasn't, just that I certainly wasn't aware of them.

How high did you go in high school?

36:47 I finished the Leaving Certificate, I matriculated. At that stage I'd had enough of asking my mum and dad for money every time I needed some money, so I went and worked for a bank and I worked for a bank for twenty years. Then in the 1980s I gave that away and funnily enough, I bought a business at The Rocks, Millers Point, a shop, and I was there for nearly four years. Then I got into the public sector of Aboriginal Affairs and I have been involved in that ever since, both at the Commonwealth and State levels.

I'll get into more detail of those particular occupations. Talking a little bit about religion - was your family religious?

37:26 No. My dad - I am sorry, I am laughing - my dad during different times sort of didn't embrace religion but there were times where I think he wanted to. The answer I think is no,

that we weren't a particularly religious family. My brother and I..... I think were given our own reign on that, as to whether we went to church. We actually identified as members of the Church of England rather than Catholic, or any other, but I have to say apart from attending church as a very, very young kid we were quite unreligious. My dad sort of struggled with that for a whole lot of reasons, including his own upbringing, where he had a pretty hard upbringing and I think he needed to be convinced that there was some benefit in being religious, given he had a hard time and suffered a lot of racial abuse in his life. I think he let my brother and myself make up our own minds. I might add I've done the same thing with my own children. My wife is Catholic and I am happy for them to be raised as Catholic.

38:42 My wife, funnily enough, is not a native of Millers Point but we met because of her family owning a business in Millers Point and she is still a member of the committee of St Brigid's Church. Very active churchgoer, goes to Mass every week, is on the church committee and all that sort of stuff. So we still retain that. My three children went to St Brigid's, as I say, they were raised as Catholics and they went to Catholic education, unlike me, I had a public school education, so we still retain that interest. Whenever something is happening, particularly around St Brigid's we try and attend. I quite often go to Mass with Judy but I don't do much, I just go with her, sit down and shut up.

39:38 I must say my dad, for a number of years had a very close relationship with a bloke by the name of Bingham, who was the minister for the Garrison Church, my dad and he got on very well. I think he was trying to convert my dad and get him to come to church but my dad never..... although he enjoyed the bloke's company and they got on very well I don't think he ever succumbed to his invitations. My dad, funnily enough, actually painted the rectory on a number of occasions, he got the job a couple of times to actual paint it. It is a magnificent house, it is a lovely house, on the corner of Trinity Avenue and Lower Fort Street.

Your father was a painter for the MSB?

40:26 Yes he worked for them for a little while but he was mainly a contractor in his own right. I must say he was a very good painter, everybody wherever he did any work would always comment on the fact on how good he was. He did his trade and all that, as I said.

It has been said that the old history of The Rocks, in those early days of the colony, there was some Aboriginal-white marriages unacceptable to society that used to happen there, can you shed any light on that?

40:57 I don't know any particular instances but I have no doubt that would be the case. I am aware of many examples across the country. There is no doubt that in those days it wasn't uncommon, particularly when you look at the working-class. I am aware that in the first hundred or so years in Australia - and probably we still haven't dropped the class prejudices - but in terms of the working-class, and if you like to use the term lower-classes there is no doubt, as in elsewhere in Australia where unmarried men who don't readily have a pool of other partners form relationships with Aboriginal women. So I have got no doubt that may or may not have been the case, I am sure it would have been the case in Millers Point.

42:03 It is a phenomenon that in terms of the dispossession that happened over time between white and black Australia there is no doubt that the first people that were adversely affected by that were the men, they would be the first to suffer the consequences. For obvious reasons probably, they are the hunters and the fighters etcetera, so as a result generally speaking, in a society that is affected by that sort of interaction there is quite a difference in terms of the numbers of men and numbers of women. In terms of how cultures interact on the sort of edges of society there is no doubt that those relationships would have been formed.

42:55 The more difficult one and most unusual was the other way around, where you had white women taking up relationships with black men, although I am aware of quite a few of those, not so much at Millers Point but certainly in Sydney. I have no doubt mate, I have to be honest, Aboriginal women are pretty attractive women and although I won't rave on I am not surprised that that would be the case. I don't know of any particular examples, not in my time, I am not aware of any particular examples.

Now there is an interesting kind of historical background to, say, Hickson Road that you probably know about and the Plague, these are sort of major events that happened in the history of Millers Point. Do you know anything about the influence of the Plague?

43:53 Well just through reading history, it is not something that I can say, I would probably have to be another hundred years old. There is no doubt there were two things that occurred about the same time. One in the beginning of the twentieth century, that is around about nineteen hundred, Sydney all of a sudden had this Bubonic Plague on its hands. Around about the same time, within the same decade or two, there was a need to really make the waterfront much more effective, much more efficient. So two things happened, and I am not sure which

one facilitated the other but there was an awful lot of housing destroyed as a result of trying to get rid of the Plague. The way I understand that they did it was to quarantine the houses and then either whitewash them completely or just knock them over and burn them. Millers Point was the first place where the Plague was first recorded, although I understand, you'd have to check the history books, whilst it was the first case recorded the person didn't die, but it was the first case recorded and there were other deaths. From what I have read, whilst there might have been one or two deaths there wasn't a lot of deaths, there were deaths elsewhere in Sydney but not in Millers Point. Nevertheless, the waterfront was deemed to be the place where the vapours and whatever they thought created Bubonic Plague, they didn't realise it was caused by the fleas off the rats.

45:43 About that time also, ship owners realised that in terms of global trends, et cetera, there was still an awful lot of money to be made in shipping and Australia, whether it is exports or imports is ripe for that. We are an island and they realised they needed to modernise the waterfront. There was a major, world-class actually, re-engineering of the Millers Point area, particularly Walsh Bay, Darling Harbour, around that area, which you see now in Hickson Road and the upper levels of the wharves and the bridges to give greater access. Whereas previously it was pretty archaic, even to the point where, in the wrong weather you couldn't even get a wagon or whatever, in to unload. So that occurred around about the same ten or twenty years, it sounds a long time, and I am not sure which facilitated the other but it was a dramatic re-engineering and re-shaping of Millers Point and The Rocks area. Not so much The Rocks but certainly the Walsh Bay-Darling Harbour side of things, where all of a sudden there are sealed roads, better access, more modern waterfront facilities, all that sort of thing, which of course put a lot of money in. The ship owners I think were very clever in that they got the public purse to pay for that, even though they were the main beneficiaries of those efficiencies. The Plague, of course - eventually they found out what was causing it and they had the rat catchers and all the rest of it.

47:20 It is interesting that, I guess it was also an opportunity for the City Council people to say 'here is an opportunity to clean up The Rocks', which by all accounts was absolutely to use a rough term a 'shit-box' in terms of the quality of housing, the squalor, the poverty. The things that were happening there: substance abuse, drink abuse, disease, including STDs, blah, blah, blah. By all accounts it was a pretty awful place.

When you were growing up Russell, would you have considered you and your family to be poor?

48:01 Well my mum may have a different view here. I think I have said this before, I think that is one of the things that everybody shared that lived in Millers Point, we shared poverty or elements of it. Nobody had much money that I can recall, I can't remember anybody being particularly wealthy, although there was elements of that. Because I was young and growing up - for instance all of a sudden you'd see somebody with a new car, or someone with a television. When it first started in 1956 one of my neighbours was one of the first persons to get a television and I can recall it and all of a sudden there were forty kids sitting in his bloody lounge room, watching this TV. One or two of the pubs got television and that was a great thing. I remember very well - I used to go round to my grandmother's place in Kent Street and we'd stand outside the Captain Cook Hotel and they used to have swinging doors and every now and then someone would walk in or out and you would be able to see the TV and that was a great thing. We weren't allowed to stand in the door and we certainly weren't allowed to stand inside the door of the pub because the publican would kick us up the bum and tell us to go, but we would stand on the footpath waiting for someone to go in or out. Every now and again one of the kids would walk over and swing the door so you could see the TV.

49:25 Coming back to your question: there is no doubt that the nature of the waterfront and the structure of the wages..... my dad was a tradesman and he managed to get x amount of dollars a week, I might add my mother worked all her life, so we were living probably from hand-to-mouth most weeks. I don't recall my mother or my father ever giving me evidence that we had a lot of savings, I don't remember, if we did I am not aware of it, not until later in life anyway, and I think most families were the same. I think I have shared this with you before, we managed to pay all the bills, I don't remember us being behind in our rent and I well remember the rent man coming to collect the rent. As I do remember the bread cart when I was a little fellow and the ice-man and the coalman coming, in those days that was common. I think we did share our poverty, there was a bit of variation within the community, probably some people were better off but if they were, they weren't terribly well off, they were just better off. Maybe because they were more frugal, maybe non-drinkers, non-gamblers, who knows, I don't know, but most people didn't have much money.

50:50 As kids, whatever money we had you had to scrounge it. I think I have suggested it to you before, we would try to borrow some things that weren't lost from time-to-time. I can

vividly remember pinching drinks off the drink trucks or whatever delivery trucks would come we would try and pinch something. Most of the kids knew which trucks were due on which days and in the school holidays we'd be strategically placed so that when the driver went in to get the order we'd 'borrow' one or two drinks off the back of his truck. We'd go down the wharf and we'd have string bags and you'd put the drinks into the string bag and lower them down into the water so that at least they'd be cool, not hot, those sort of things. No, not an affluent society as a whole.

51:38 Funnily enough, the businesses in those days down there seemed to do well, or do okay, you know, a couple of grocery shops, a couple of milk bars, fish and chips shop, couple of greengrocers. Joe Leonard, who I vividly remember, a great friend of my mum and dad, Cathy Leonard who is on that list, her dad, running one of the greengrocer shops. I can remember vividly going round with my mother giving me the shopping list and I'd go around and give it to Mrs Smith, whose shop was on the corner of Argyle Street and High Street. I'd give her the list and she'd fill up all these things I'd have to carry home and that would go on the book, no cash changed hands. I assume then that every month my mum would go round and settle the account. I know of many other families who did that. So we were living from week-to-week and then when you got your wages you'd go and fix the bill. Mrs Smith would say to you, 'Does that go in the book, Russ?' and I'd say 'yes, please' and she'd write it in the book and it was the done thing. I think many, many families used that facility so it just indicates to me that most of us were in the same boat - we didn't have a lot of money, mate.

Like the communal credit system. What were some of the names the locals gave to specific parts of Millers Point, I believe there are some really interesting names?

53:17 In terms of the waterfront there are probably more than this. Different parts of the waterfront, places around Walsh Bay, there was one place called 'The Floods', which I think goes back to Floods being the original ship owner or wharf owner years ago and it retains that name. In fact the Water Police took it up and I think there is a modern hotel there now.

Isn't where The Park Hyatt now is?

53:50 The Park Hyatt is there. That was known as 'The Floods'. There was another place as you come round a bit further, I think it is between 1 and 4 Walsh Bay, which was known as the 'Chains' and it was a good fishing spot. The 'Metal Wharf,' which is probably the main meeting place in the summer for many of us kids because we all swam there. We were always getting

chastised by our parents for swimming there, regularly, and every school holiday..... there wouldn't be one school holiday went past where you didn't at some stage have a swim down the 'Metal Wharf'. I am not sure where it got its name, its proper name is Towns Place but it was know as the 'Met', or 'Metal Wharf'.

What about the 'Pick-up', where was that?

54:37 The 'Pick-up was in Towns Place, which was the wharfies' pick-up, it was the main area where the wharfies were engaged in terms of their briefs. I mean it was a better system than the old 'Hungry Mile' system, where they were just picked up on the nod of a head and the foremen, I understand, were the people who decided whether you worked or not for that day. Millers Point, I think I mentioned this, I am not sure why or what the background to it, but many, many of the waterside workers that lived in Millers Point were foremen, known as pannos, that was the colloquial sort of name, and we often refer to Millers Point as 'Pannos Point' because there were a number of foremen.

55:30 I remember a friend of mine, his father, Frank Flood, and his brother Jack, they were both foremen. I would have to think about it now but there were many, many others. They were pretty hard men and they were men to be reckoned with, they were also probably very good workers as well but one of the reasons they got their job, I am sure, is because they could exert a bit of influence and a bit of control. I mean that has been part of the history of the place forever. The majority of the residents of Millers Point have fulfilled the role of providing labour for whatever, shipping and maritime industries around, particular wharfies and their leaders, I guess. Also of course, not that I know a lot about it, it has a very interesting history in terms of the union movement in this country.

What is so interesting about it?

56:31 Well, my dad being a sort of outsider to that industry, because he was a painter and decorator, and not a particularly unionised person, although he became so later when he became a watchman, if you weren't a member of the union you simply didn't work. So you had to embrace union ideals, collective bargaining, collective decision-making, all of that. Quite frankly, if you did not you were certainly put in Coventry but there might be other things that you might have to contend with, including simply being black-banned, you wouldn't work. So Millers Point, no doubt was a stronghold for the maritime unions and some of the most strident supporters of those principles and those organisations, particularly the Waterside

Workers' Federation, lived and came from Millers Point. I am not an expert on the history of that but I just simply know it is the case. The same with the other maritime unions, including the Seamen's Union, where many of the stalwarts of that union lived, or based themselves at Millers Point. They came from all over the world, they weren't just locals, they didn't grow up at Millers Point, they grew up in other parts of the world, might be English or whatever, but well-known Millers Point characters. Even including the Communist Party, where I know one or two officials of the Communist Party were residents of Millers Point as well. So as far as I know there has always been that strong association with the maritime unions and Millers Point, always.

58:18 END OF TAPE MP-FH12 SIDE B

00:01 START OF TAPE MP-FH13 SIDE A

00:05 Tape Identification

Russell what was Millers Point like when you were growing up as a kid, can you describe the environment and the spirit of the community?

00:26 I have often heard and I know there was an earlier publication that talked about Millers Point in the context of being an urban village and I think that is probably a good description. However, it was an urban village with a very, very strong maritime feel to it and by that I mean the traffic that continually passed through the place, the sounds, the smells, the activity all had a strong maritime element.

01:07 Urban village is not a bad description but I think we need to be careful about that, I think there is some sort of conceptual picture of a peaceful, quiet rural setting when you talk about an urban village and that wasn't Millers Point. But in the context of the people that lived there it is appropriate, I think we were self-contained as a community. We were this little community that was very, very closely located to the CBD but never part of the CBD. The Millers Point buses - when you got on to a Millers Point bus was very much home and a haven that had nothing to do with the city or any other part of Sydney.

01:51 As I say, one of the elements is that we shared our poverty. As you know it was very much, or exclusively a public housing domain, in the whole area there was only one or two properties in the time that I grew up that were privately owned, otherwise all of the other houses were public housing, in this case the landlord was the Maritime Services Board and of course they have since gone over to the Department of Housing, but in my day our landlord was the Maritime Services Board. They owned the pubs even, they owned everything, the shops, the pubs and the houses, so we were all public housing.

02:26 It was very busy - as I say, a very active place, in terms of the human traffic as well as the mechanical traffic, trucks, lorries and so on, that were continually to'ing and fro'ing from the wharf. It was a happy environment, I think, in terms of the people that lived there generally, although I am reluctant to paint too positive a picture. As you know I still retain relationships with a whole lot of people who I grew up with in Millers Point and without question they all have positive views about their life at Millers Point and they all have positive views about the place as being their home country and I share that with them, so that might give you some context. There is this sense of loyalty and sense of group allegiance to the place, I think that is very strong, and while we might all argue once we get into other domains - what binds us together is the fact that we grew up together in Millers Point.

03:42 I played football for Millers Point, I grew up there, I had a business in Millers Point, I still have many friends that live there and I go down there quite regularly, so it is an association. Even though I don't live there permanently, as I said, my wife is still very heavily involved in the church there and she could go to church many other places but she chooses to go back to St Brigid's. So there is elements of that about the place, that people that lived there and grew up there have this affiliation that lasts a life time, you never lose it.

Can you describe to me the house in 14 Trinity Avenue.

04:20 Sure. It was a wonderful house, actually. It was a sandstone brick place, one of these two-storey places. Nowadays people think it is sort of built upside down, where the kitchen is upstairs, the toilet and laundry are upstairs. When I grew up we had a proper toilet but we had a copper and we had a fuel stove in the early days, I can well remember my mother cooking on a fuel stove and boiling up the copper to do our washing because I know my brother and I used to go and get the wood to make sure she had enough wood. The back yard and the kitchen and the sort of laundry and toilet area was upstairs at the back, this is on the second-

storey, then we had our bedrooms and bathroom.

05:13 Earlier on we had a fuel stove but eventually we got gas appliances. Downstairs were two rooms that we used for various things, at different times - they were bedrooms or a lounge room, eventually became the lounge, sort of living area, which was downstairs. They were joined by a very, very, very steep staircase. That is a very bad description, Frank. We had of course a verandah which my dad built and filled in, when we moved there in the early days it was just an open verandah and then my dad filled it in, so at different stages that acted as a bedroom, or a spare room, or whatever. My dad was continually painting it and trying to keep it in pretty good nick, and I have to say it was in good nick. Every now and then of course the Maritime people would come along and do some maintenance work on it, paint it or whatever, but essentially my dad maintained it, when it needed a new coat of paint or whatever he would do that. I loved the joint, even though probably in more modern eyes it probably looked a little bit ordinary, but we loved it, we thought it was a great house.

Did you occupy the whole house?

06:27 Yes, although with our neighbours we shared this common staircase that went from the ground floor. There was a staircase between number 14 and number 16, so you'd go up the stairs and we'd go into our back yard and they'd go into their back yard. I am not sure if I am describing this well.

Interior or exterior staircase?

06:47 Well it was exterior. The way to the two houses were built you had this sort of alcove that went up the middle, you'd go up the stairs and then the neighbours would go into their back yard, and then we'd go into our back yard, which was up on the top level. It was built upside down a bit. Trinity Avenue, where these places are were built into the hill.

Now what was the period that your family occupied that?

07:11 I was born in 1948, I think my mum and dad moved in the late 1940s, I am not quite sure whether it was 1947 or 1948. Then they left about the mid-1970s but I had already left. I was working, I think I mentioned to you I got a job in a bank and I started to travel around New South Wales, working in the banking game on relieving staff and things like that, so I left when I was about seventeen or eighteen, about mid-1960s I left, so I no longer lived there permanently. It was what I consider to be a great house and it is still there and it is still in good

nick. There is a family living there at the moment I don't know who they are but it looks nice, it still looks like it is a good house. We loved it, apart from the fact it had extremely steep bloody stairs, I have to tell you, although as a young kid you don't worry about it but nowadays it would represent a bit of a challenge, trying to get up and down those stairs. It had comfort and it was our place and we loved it.

08:20 I must say, one of the things, there even though they were public housing, I am talking about in my time growing up, there was a sense very much that this is our house. Even though they were public housing and even though we were renting them people generally treated them as if they were their houses and I think that is universal, in all of my friends' houses that I ever visited. Of course the standards would vary, depending on how affluent or whatever, but generally people looked after their houses on Millers Point. I think that is one of the reasons why the houses are in such reasonable condition.

That is interesting because there have been a number of threats to the residents, did the family ever feel threatened?

09:05 No, not really. I am talking in days where nobody locked their door, you didn't have to worry about locking your door. Whilst there was a lot of crooks amongst us we never stole from each other - you might steal from authority or steal from the wharves. For instance, nobody jumped in someone's window and pinched their radio, that didn't happen. It happens now but it didn't happen in my day. If they did I can assure you there would be pretty strong retribution from the community if they were found out.

When I said threats I actually meant threats to the continued tenancies.

09:44 Not as far as I am aware, that came in the 1970s. That was one of the reasons, not the only reason, but was one of the reasons why my mum and dad decided to leave. Actually mum and dad bought a house at Woy Woy, which was eventually to be their retirement house but one of the catalysts for that is that they could see that things were changing in terms of their relationship with the landlord and in terms of the landlord's approach to the public housing on Millers Point. Rents were going up.

10:13 The Maritime Services Board were, in my view, a very benevolent landlord. By that I mean they were true to the original purpose of those houses, which was to provide low-cost accommodation for waterfront workers and their families, that was the whole underpinnings of why all those houses were built and set up in the first place. The Maritime Services Board, as

far as I know, as far as I am aware, genuinely were true to that. They weren't particularly concerned in having high rents, they were reasonably good in terms of their maintenance, where if something needed to be done, if not immediately but sooner or later, they would do it, so they met their obligations as landlords. But I think from the 1970s onwards, Frank, that started to change pretty dramatically.

Well the Sydney Cove Redevelopment came into didn't they, what happened when they came?

11:13 Well, I wasn't there at the time, maybe talk to others who might have been. Look, for instance, I can tell you now - I was horrified one day. I went to a mate of mine's place and they had replaced some windows, and the windows were magnificent cedar sash windows and these buggers had replaced them with aluminium and I thought how can you possibly do that to this place, how could you possibly even consider this, but it is cheaper option, easy to put in. Of course rents started to go up and rents then started to be pegged on income levels rather than anything else. I am no expert on this but the whole relationship and the whole nature of that living experience started to change and I believe it has changed dramatically to the point where you've got Millers Point as we know it today, which is still obviously a public housing precinct but there is no sense of community, no sense of that village-type atmosphere that I talked about, which I think was very strong when I was a young bloke. You simply have the whole variation of people who live in the same area but otherwise share nothing in common and pay rents that are set and geared to income and eligibility and all that sort of stuff. I am aware of the drivers as to why public housing has changed, I am well aware of that, but it was a dramatic, in my view, change. Those sort of economic drivers and changes in public housing approaches really meant a dramatic change for Millers Point, no question of that.

Going back to your youth again when you were living at 14 Trinity Avenue - who were the neighbours around, do you know their names?

13:10 We had a couple of spinsters, a Miss Taylor and Beryl D'Arcy, and I think both of them have passed on now. They were very good neighbours, they kept to themselves and were very nice people. We had an older couple, Lenny Bowers I remember as a boy and his wife, who were a mature-aged couple, very good friends of my mum and dad and probably my mum will tell you more about that. The neighbours that I had the most to do with were the Caruanas who lived in number 20 Trinity Avenue. They were a very interesting family in that 'Happy' Caruana, John, I think his Christian name was but everyone knew him as 'Happy' - he was the

father, was the leader of the family, he married a local girl, or a family that lived locally, her name was Peggy, I am not quite sure of her maiden name but my mum would know. So she was a Millers Point person and he was a migrant from Malta. They obviously were allocated this house and they had three children, John, Tina and Billy. I think Billy Caruana is one of the people, I don't know if you have already spoken to Billy but you should.

We've interviewed Dawn.

14:35 Well Dawn is John's wife, John has passed away now. John, sadly, and his son, were killed in a car accident. You really need to talk to Bill. Bill and I were the closest in terms of age, Billy is about a year older than me, Johnny was about four years older than me and a year or two older than my brother, then Tina was I think my brother's age. We were very close friends, our parents were very firm friends and shared many a social evening together. 'Happy' was well-known, he was very, very outgoing, that sort of person. A very interesting person in his own right. I am not quite sure, Frank and I have to be careful about this but 'Happy' worked on the waterfront but he had many other strings to his bow and he was a very important mover and shaker in the Maltese community, very important.

15:32 I am not sure of the full details and I need to be careful about this but all I can say is he was very well regarded by the Maltese. He had a lot of influence with the police force and I remember on occasions his intervention got me out of trouble when I was a kid. He had a lot of irons in the fire, not necessarily legal, but a lot of irons in the fire. A wonderful man, I loved him dearly. He was strange character he used to have this booming voice, never ever spoke unless he was shouting at the top of his voice. The kids, of course, we were all good mates and apart from John's passing we are still good friends although I have seen Tina recently but we all good friends. Billy every now and again I go down and say hello to Bill and have a cup of coffee. Billy has had a sad life, he looks a lot older than me and we are just about the same age, because of his illness and his health not being too good. You really should talk to Billy. So he was an interesting fellow and they were probably the family that we were mainly closely associated with, in fact a lot of the people used to refer to us as cousins, although we were no relation, it is just that we were very close as families. So they are the neighbours.

16:50 Once again, part of the reason we were close was because we lived in the same street, Trinity Avenue. You have this clear relationship with wherever you lived, Frank, whether you were a High Street boy or a Windmill Street boy or a Lower Fort Street or Trinity Avenue, or

whatever, that was important. I am not saying there was all sorts of categories or whatever but it was important and you identified with where you lived. I know that Frank Hyde often talks about the Windmill Street mob playing football against the High Street boys and we did all that. We used to have regular football games where you'd have anything from twenty to fifty kids playing football, all in the one game. We'd play basketball at the King George V Playground, which was a great source of recreation for most of the kids over a long time. You know, kids that actually went there as babies finished up teaching there and supervising. It was a very good social thing for the Council to do. We played tennis, basketball, touch football, cricket, you name it, roller-skating, we did all that there, young social clubs and things.

The Caruanas - what number did they live in?

18:17 20 I think it is, it is either 20 or 22. There was a row of houses starting with 14 and I think it finished with 22 and then there is a sort of open allotment which used to be where Mrs Caruana, Peggy, Aunty Peg as I knew her, she had a big clothesline. Remember those clothesline posts, it was about as big as a telegraph pole, and she used to hang her washing out on that space. That is now a little roped-off playground area. 'Happy' was an interesting bloke - he had goats, he had chickens, he had dogs, he had everything in this very small house.

Where did he keep his goats - in the back yard?

18:56 No, in this little space that I am talking about. He had a pig, I remember him slaughtering a pig at one stage in the yard. He was an interesting characters and as I say, I loved him, he used to scare a lot of kids. He was only a small man but he had this booming voice and he had this Maltese accent, his English wasn't the best, so he was a formidable character but he was a funny bloke. Billy will tell you more about his dad than I can.

Is he on that list you gave me?

Billy Caruana, 'Happy', the fellow I am talking about, is his father.

So you were at number 14, so who was at number 16?

19:40 Miss Taylor, same name, no relation, just a coincidence. She was a spinster and she shared the house with Beryl D'Arcy and I remember her. Beryl was also a very prim and proper spinster and she was very strongly associated with the church, one of the stalwarts of the church. I forget now, the Demitris moved in when I was a bit older, when I moved away. As I say, there was the Caruanas and then the Hickeys lived in the last house but they were a

family that was much older than us, Jimmy Hickey was a friend of my dad's.

What number would they have been?

20:18 I think it is 22. So the seven houses, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, I am pretty sure Billy lived in number 20, the Caruanas were in number 20. He was an interesting fellow. For instance, each of the children when they turned eighteen 'Happy' bought them a car. Now on Millers Point that was unprecedented, nobody could afford to buy anybody a car, yet John, Tina and Billy all got motor vehicles when they turned eighteen. I'll never forget Billy got a Holden station wagon, BWV 498 was the number plate I remember. Billy William Vincent is the only reason I can remember, Billy's name is William Vincent Caruana, that is why I can remember it. Billy used to drive us around everywhere at that stage. All I am saying, he is an unusual man and this bloke, I don't know where he got his wealth from and I have to be careful saying that but he did that. He treated his children wonderfully well. He sent John back to Malta for a trip, I remember going down the boat and seeing John go and I think he was over in Malta for three or four months to see his family and all that. He was a great dad.

Who were on the other side, like number 12?

21:39 The rectory, whoever the minister was. I mentioned Minister Bingham, I think his first name was Richard but I am not sure, but anyway, he was Mr Bingham to us, he and my dad they were good mates. I am trying to think of his name but he was a ship's captain on the other side of Trinity Avenue, Robert and Sylvia, and I can't think of his second name, he was a ship's captain. Sylvia was Peggy Caruana's sister, so was Billy and John and Tina's aunty. I didn't know them because they were a mature couple, my mum and dad knew them better than I did. Then of course you had the church and the drill hall and the military barracks so Trinity Avenue didn't have a lot of families in it.

What was Darling House at that time, which is now an old-age home?

22:39 Well next door to us was what we used to call Gus Leonard's. Gus Leonard was a Chinaman that rented that yard, I don't think he owned it I think he rented it, we used to refer to it as Gus Leonard's. Next door was a transport company's yard and they used to park their trucks there, LEP Transport I think it was called. This was when I was a young bloke, it probably had previous uses to that. They were just vacant blocks that had cyclone fences, wire fences, big tall fences, actually, because us kids used to climb up and climb down. Gus Leonard - I don't know what he did but he had tea chests there all the time and we often played in the tea

chests. They weren't vacant lots, they were like depots. Nowadays, as you say, they have been developed.

Was Darling House then Darling House as well?

No, it wasn't there not when I was a kid, that house wasn't there, the building wasn't there.

Darling House is right on the edge of it, basically.

23:51 If we are talking about the same place. You are talking about as you drive into Trinity Avenue there is two lots there.

Well if you are facing south then it is on the left, Darling House.

That wasn't there, there was no building, to my knowledge there was no building there, I can't recall the building being there. I think that has been built to look as though it is an historical building but it is not. I may be wrong but I am pretty sure, I know when LEP Transport was there they had what I can remember as a crappy sort of building there, it was timber, so there wasn't much of a structure there.

24:38 Look, I need to be careful about this and I'll need to ask my mother but I have a feeling it was originally called McCrea Transport or something like that and then later became LEP Transport, but the years are a bit tricky there. I know they were basically depots and they used to park their trucks and they'd have pallets and stuff there, so it was just a depot. The building that you are talking about that was built later on.

Now who was Henry Cleaver and what is your association with him?

25:20 Harry Cleaver was my dad's stepfather. I don't know a great deal about him, I understand he was a shearer, but his shearing days were probably over by the time when I was a baby and growing up. He didn't enjoy good health for many years. He'd get sort of different work from time-to-time. He lived, I should say, in 41 Kent Street with my grandmother Mary. I think I mentioned to you that I know at one stage there for some time they were doing some road works or construction works associated with the waterfront there and he was employed by the Maritime to go down and light a lot of the lamps.

26:09 I'd often go down with him where we'd just walk around Walsh Bay from the Bridge right round to Towns Place and those wharves along there and he'd light all the lamps, between five and six o'clock of a night. I didn't know him very well, it is funny to say that but I didn't, but he never seemed to enjoy good health, he seemed to be crook all the time, I am not sure what

the problem was. I know he had a drink problem but I am not sure that was exactly the problem.

Now your grandparents lived at 41 Kent Street.

That is my father's mum. My other grandparents lived in Chippendale, in Redfern.

Can you describe the house at 41 Kent Street to me?

26:57 It was a great house, part of a row of historical houses on the western side of Kent Street as you head south, I think it is the third one from the Captain Cook Hotel. It is one of these great sandstone three-level places where you have this level below street level, then you have this ground floor level. Below street level consisted of kitchen and a spare room, bedroom, whatever you want to call it, then out the backyard was a laundry-bathroom. Then the ground floor level was just a lounge room and another sitting room, dining room, call it what you like. Then you went up to the top level which consisted of two bedrooms. The toilet and stuff was downstairs, out in the backyard. It was a great house, not a bad little yard. Later in life of course they all sealed the yards but I can remember it being grass and stuff and having flowers and whatever. It was a great house. I haven't been in these places recently but I used to love it as a kid. Once again, one of the characteristics is very steep stairs, whether you had to go down or up, very steep stairs.

That is a feature of Millers Point I think, those stairs.

28:15 Of course great views from the back of the Harbour. Out of my grandmother's bedroom and the middle room you had fantastic views of Darling Harbour and out towards that area, fantastic views. A bit noisy because it was three doors from the pub and of course Kent Street is a very busy street. I do remember as a kid when we'd stay there overnight of a weekend, or whatever it might be, the street sounds of both people and machines and stuff was quite vivid, it was a very noisy place. Not all the time, but quite often.

How did you get around at Millers Point, were there any trams going?

29:02 Yes the trams were great. The bus routes that probably go through there now mirror the tram routes where it would sort of terminate at Argyle Place there and then go back to the city. We used to love the trams. My brother had a very serious accident on the trams. The trams were very, very heavily patronised by the people of Millers Point in terms of getting access into and back from the city, otherwise you'd have to get a tram to Circular Quay and then walk up through Argyle Cut and of course if you had been shopping in town the last thing

you want to do is carry all your heavy parcels so we'd generally wait for a Millers Point tram to come along. My brother, when he was about ten or eleven, maybe twelve, had a very serious accident getting off a tram actually, in Lower Fort Street, he fell and broke his hip and he was in hospital for months so I have bitter-sweet memories about trams. We were often what we called 'scaling' trams, which means you are jumping on for nothing and not paying your fare and getting off. It was part of the sport, I guess, of being a kid, trying to get a free ride home and sometimes we were successful and sometimes we weren't but all of us kids did it. I still believe it is one of the things that sadly is a change in Sydney that should never have been changed and I think Melbourne confirms that.

30:47 END OF TAPE MP-FH13 SIDE A

30:50 START OF TAPE MP-FH13 SIDE B

Now talking about jobs, you worked for the bank for twenty years, which bank was that?

31:01 First of all it was the CBA Bank, the Commercial Bank of Australia, which in 1984 became Westpac, when it merged with the Bank of New South Wales. That was the start of the end for me because I had reached middle management level, I wasn't enjoying what I was doing and it became more and more sort of morally difficult for me to justify what I was doing so the merger was the catalyst that told me I needed to get out of it. I did, I got out of it and I had my own business at Millers Point, I bought a mixed business at Millers Point and had that for nearly three and a half years, something like that. My wife wasn't enjoying the best of health so I was forced to put the shop on the market and I applied for a job as a director of the State Land Council, the Aboriginal Land Council, and through that I was offered another job and I have been working in the public sector of Aboriginal Affairs ever since.

Now what do you do currently?

32:11 I am the CEO for the New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office, which essentially looks after the housing needs of Aboriginal people for New South Wales in a whole range of ways. I won't bore you with that but that is exactly what our role is.

The Aboriginal population - do you think they are well housed?

32:32 Oh no, there is plenty of room for improvement. New South Wales from an Aboriginal perspective is the most populous state, got the most Aboriginal people living in it, and I guess the perception is that because New South Wales is probably the most urbanised state as well that public housing meets all blackfellows' housing needs. All I can say, Frank, that is clearly not the case, we have got a long way to go. Difficult job, but I enjoy elements of it. I enjoy where we have some victories and we have some progress.

33:14 One of the issues is that quite frankly overall the level of funding available is simply not enough and simply doesn't recognise the emerging needs that are coming through the demographics and growth of the Aboriginal population. In the mainstream population you are generally talking about an ageing population, the demographics of the Aboriginal population are exactly the opposite, seventy-five per cent of people are under the age of twenty. So for the next ten or fifteen years that represents an exponential increase in the housing needs, particularly public housing so there is a challenge there, mate.

It doesn't look like it is going to be met, that challenge.

34:00 Not unless there is a dramatic increase in the amount of funding available. We can be as smart as we like in terms of trying to use current levels of funding properly and more effectively but unless we get more money you are trying to hold the tide back, mate.

That is a real problem. Now let us get on to the subject of sports and leisure and sporting activities you might have done at Millers Point, what did you play at?

34:23 Played everything and so did most kids. Football, rugby league, normally I might add but all sorts of football, basketball, all mad cricket players, tennis and paddle tennis. I am talking whether you are hitting a ball up against the wall of a wool store bond, I am not talking about playing on a nice grass court here, but whatever we could do we did. The staple sports like cricket and football, obviously everybody was into that. We did bike riding, roller-skating.

One of the great leisure sports of the kids when I was a young bloke was wheelbarrows and we'd have perennial, constant wheelbarrow races down almost every hill in Millers Point. In those days the mains ones were, and I feel sorry for the people that lived there, High Street because it is a great hill if you want to race a wheelbarrow - they are great hills, and Munn Street, which was a very steep street, which is no longer there. Munn Street used to go round and down to Hickson Road and it is not there now. They were the two main sporting arenas

for billycart-wheelbarrow races. We all prided ourselves in building our own barrows and having the best barrow on the street and the fastest one and all that. We'd have those races, including down under the Bridge, the battery there. For many, many years that was one of the major recreational sports.

36:00 There was everything including swimming. Every school holiday, if we didn't swim down the wharf we'd either go to Domain Baths or North Sydney Baths. Of course a lot of families went to the beach at the weekend but generally we weren't beach people we were baths, we'd go to North Sydney Baths or the Domain, or we'd just swim locally at the Met. That happened every school holiday, I can't think of a school holiday where we didn't spend an awful lot of time swimming and mucking around to do with swimming.

What about sailing, what was happening there?

36:39 Well I wasn't a sailor, there were a couple of families that were. I think I have mentioned this, it is interesting that just before the Second World War, or up until the Second World War, there was a sailing club at Millers Point, an eighteen foot sailing club. Now they didn't have a club house or a commandant or anything but there were a group of people and many families who actually had their own eighteen foot sailing boat and they participated in races every weekend. Now that didn't happen in my time, although there were some families, I remember the Imber family, Colin Imber was a friend of mine at school who has passed away now, his family were always involved in boat races so there was always that interest.

37:23 That is another thing Frank, that the people at Millers Point were keen on, many of my colleagues, we used to go to the eighteen footers and one of the things you could do in those days was bet, you could bet on the races, so could you not only enjoy a good day on the Harbour but you could have a bet on the race if you wanted to.

Now it is unusual for a working-class family to own an eighteen foot sailing boat, isn't it?

37:48 Yes. I once saw a list where there was this, I am not sure what the word is, not a carnival, not a regatta, but there was this series of races. I saw the program and there were at least twenty Millers Point families, at least twenty, that had their own boat. They may not have been families but they were groups. You know the Floods, maybe the Lucks, I can't remember now, the Duggans. There are a lot of families associated with Millers Point where these people all had their own eighteen foot boat and in those days they would have weighed a ton, so how

they got them in and out of the water I don't know. This was, as I recall, a tribute to people going off to the war. I didn't see the race but I saw the program. I know from some of the old-timers that have spoken to me that there certainly was a keen interest in eighteen footer sailing at Millers Point and that is interesting, I don't know enough about but I know that is the case.

How much of your life, Russell, do you think has been influenced by living at Millers Point, by having grown up there?

39:08 I think all the major influences for me were shaped when I was a baby to a young mid-teens person, shaped by my life and the influences of Millers Point. Irrespective of whether some of the things I've done in life have worked out well or not, I think all of my young upbringing. I must say probably the only thing..... maybe it is my involvement in the Aboriginal community has not necessarily been shaped by things that happened at Millers Point because there wasn't that opportunity to interact. I mean we'd have visitors come to my grandmother's or come to our place from the bush, Aboriginal family, either related or extended family members and all that, so we retained, I guess, our cultural affiliations through that way but there were no other Aboriginal groups within the immediate vicinity for us to interact so I had to draw from elsewhere to do that. But otherwise every other thing, I mean I think I mentioned to you that I still have very, very strong associations and relationships with a lot of people that either did or still do live in Millers Point and that is the thing that draws us and keeps us together.

40:35 We are friends in that sense but it comes back to the fact that we grew up together in Millers Point and we all know an awful lot about each other. All know an awful lot about our families and the trials and tribulations, the deaths, the successes, the good times and the bad times. We've all lost people during that journey - that just adds a bit more cement to our relationships.

41:04 Sadly, one of the things that has happened in recent times I keep going to bloody funerals and that is maybe a reflection of the fact we are all getting a bit older. It is sad that the only time many of us see each other is on those occasions. But we also celebrate when that happens. To give you an example, I went to a friend's funeral a few months ago and that turned into a major celebration because there was an awful lot of people there, friends of mine, that hadn't seen each other for years. So you take the opportunity, apart from celebrating the life

and the death of the person whose funeral it is, you also take the opportunity to celebrate the fact that you are meeting people you haven't seen for ages. I have to say that is a strong issue in the Aboriginal community, you know funerals are very, very important occasions for that reason. It is not just a sad occasion, there is a whole range of other business happens at funerals and it is the same with the Millers Point community, so it is interesting that we share that, I think, that's a cultural thing as well as human thing.

42:07 I am sort of proud of the fact, I guess, to some degree that I come from this sort of low socio-economic area and I have achieved a few things in my life, not a lot but a bit, and so have my friends and so have my mates and I am very pleased to see that. There was some tragedies and some losses along the way with people who are no longer with us and all that sort of stuff but generally speaking I think that certainly the poverty issue is an issue where most of us use that as an impetus or incentive to do something a bit better for our kids, do you know what I mean, I think that has been influential. The history of the place is such that you can't help live there and not feel part of the history of the joint, you only need to walk around and have a look at the buildings.

You still have this very strong sense of identification with Millers Point?

Oh yes, very much so.

But you live in Newtown now.

43:07 Live in Newtown. Two things, I think Frank, and I make no excuses for this, it is a fact, it is a question of affordability. I mean my home now is at Port Stephens and I bought in Newtown as a convenience because it gives me a base in Sydney while I am working here. I would have much rather bought something in Millers Point - it is a question of affordability and availability. The places that I would love to buy in Millers Point either are not available for sale or I couldn't afford them. There is one or two buildings there I would love to own, just because of the nature and the history of the place, but that is common with everybody, I think.

43:54 It is interesting that when I had the shop there my wife and the kids lived in the residence, that residence recently passed hands for nine hundred thousand dollars. It is only a residence, it is not a stand-alone building, there's the shop and the residence behind it, eight hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars, so there is a price. I would have loved to have lived there but there is a price you are prepared to pay, so it is an economic issue and all that. I still

go down there regularly, when my father-in-law comes down and my mum comes down we go down there, even if it is just drive around and go home, it sort of calls you back a bit. It is changing to the worst in my view when I drive around and see some of these high-rise I shed a tear a bit, I guess, because it will never be the same.

What do you think the threats are to Millers Point and to the future of its existence?

44:45 Well it has already happened, the things that I wouldn't have wanted to happen have happened. This is the fragmentation, I guess, of families of two or three generations, maybe more, lived there, that fragmentation has happened. The physical feel of the joint is changing where you've now got these cute elements of the historical precinct that people still look at but they sit side-by-side with high-rise developments that overlook the Harbour and I think that is sad. Not to say I wouldn't like to live there mate, in one of those high-rises, I probably would, but I think there is an element of sadness about the fact that that has been allowed to happen.

45:32 It would have been great had people had the vision to say that this is a precinct worth preserving and we are going to preserve it, and don't matter what the pressures are that come from developers or anything else, we are going to preserve it, it would have been wonderful. Some of the shops and stuff that used to be there that is not there, they were fantastic buildings in their own right. If for no other reason, I don't care what else happened there, they could have changed it, but if they had just kept them it would have been great. I know they have retained quite a lot but every now and then there is something that spoils what they have retained, so I am a little bit disappointed. I mean I still love the joint, still love going down there and saying hello to various people that I know. I don't know how long that is going to continue because the more and more I go down there the more and more I don't know the people and as I say, I'm going to more and more funerals.

46:33 In terms of my era it has been a great place, it has produced many successful people, probably nobody that is particularly famous but has produced many people that have achieved a lot of things in their life. Without necessarily having a Bill Gates, or whatever, in the world it is question of what your framework is for success and all that, there have been plenty of people that now have provided a better future and better choices for their families and their kids and that is a good thing. People that you might have thought when I was a kid maybe didn't have a good chance, some of the families down there. The fact that some of my friends have

not only survived but done very well is a credit to them rather than their family and their environment.

47:25 Frank whilst I've talked to you in very positive terms about Millers Point there is also some very sad stories and very difficult stories with regard to particular families, you know, the domestic issues, domestic violence, that sort of stuff. I don't want to be negative but you have got to recognise it, that like any community, particularly where you are talking about one that is at the lower end of the socio-economic hierarchy, you are going to have problems where there is a battle for survival, where you have financial distress all the time. Then you introduce into the mix grog, drugs, all of a sudden you are going to have problems. My view of Millers Point will always err to the positive side because it is that sort of joint. It is rich in history and that history - some is good, some is bad but you still think it is interesting.

That is a great summing up there, thank you very much for the interview that you have given us today it is very valuable.

48:56 END OF INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL TAYLOR & EDN OF TAPE MP-FH13 SIDE B.