



ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Ann Symonds

INTERVIEWER: Virginia Macleod

PLACE: Macquarie St, Sydney

DATE: 4 May 2012

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **VM:** I'm speaking today with Ann Symonds who lives at the Astor and today is Friday, the 4th of May 2012 and I'm talking with her for the City of Sydney Oral History Project, 'Shelter'. My name is Virginia McLeod.

Ann, what year were you born?

AS: I was born in 1939.

VM: And where were you born?

AS: I was born in the country town of Murwillumbah on the Tweed River on the 12th of July which was Orangeman's Day into an extremely devout Irish Catholic family. I started life in difficult circumstances.

VM: You were born on the wrong day. They never forgot your birthday, I guess. And you grew up in Murwillumbah?

AS: I was there till in primary school and I won two bursaries which used to be a feature of Australian life and therefore I won this wonderful

prize, being sent away to St Mary's Ladies' College in Lismore for five years of secondary education.

VM: So it was a boarding school?

AS: Boarding school. I did always go home for the school holidays but I really can't say that I grew up there in that significant teenage sort of period.

VM: Yes, you were gone by then. And then when you left school, what did you do next?

AS: Well, I did want to go to university and won university scholarships but it was in the days of having to sign onto a bond to teach for five years and it was thought in my family that I'd never actually make it through the five years, so I went to the two year training course at Armidale Teachers College and was a primary school teacher.

2.21 **VM: And where did you start teaching?**

AS: My first appointment was to Casino, which meant I used to be able to go home to Murwillumbah for weekends and I was there for two years but I was desperate to go to university so I sought a transfer to Sydney and I was transferred to Sydney in 1960.

VM: And did you get to go to university?

AS: No, I didn't know where the university was. By the time I'd got here I didn't know how to enroll and then I got carried away living with friends of mine and having a good time and then I met my husband. The first time I went to university was actually when Whitlam allowed senior – well, I was considered to be senior in your thirties – to go to university and I did three years of drama at the University of New South Wales.

VM: Why did you choose drama?

AS: Because I wanted to do sociology and I applied to do sociology and Sol Encel, the professor at the time, wasn't very approving of these miscellaneous students they were called, miscellaneous students coming in.

VM: Not mature students, miscellaneous?

AS: Yes, yes, so he refused to accept any. So I'd always been interested in the arts so I went into drama and it was a wonderful, wonderful three years with people like Phillip Parsons and Vidrenal Janov(?) and a wonderful man who was present at the first production of

'Threepenny Opera' in Berlin, a friend of Brecht. I mean, it was an extraordinary group of people - - -

4.20 **VM: Really inspiring.**

AS: - - - who no longer exist, of course, and the school no longer exists.

VM: And did the drama translate back into your teaching?

AS: Well, I'd stopped teaching by then.

VM: You'd stopped by then?

AS: Yes. But I used to say when I got into the upper house that I had known what the theatre of the absurd was before I got in there.

VM: And then you added to your knowledge.

AS: It turned out to be the theatre of cruelty, really.

VM: So tell me how you met your husband.

AS: I was transferred to teaching at Bronte Public School and his first wife, his wife had died a couple of years before I got there. I taught his twins, Meredith and Michael, in third class, that's how we met.

VM: And what was his name?

AS: Maurice, M-a-u-r-i-c-e, Maurice Kenneth Symonds, and he was in charge of the Alexander Mackie College which is now in the arts section, art education section, which is now the College of Fine Arts. And my mother was very disappointed that I'd chosen not to marry the footballer that I'd been going out with who was, what do you call those?

6.02 **VM: More of a star**

AS: No, one of those overseas Kangaroos or something or other and I chose to marry this man who was older than me and already had three children and involved in the arts. I mean "How could you choose the arts when you had football?" It was very easy for me.

VM: It wouldn't have been her choice but it was easy for you.

AS: No.

VM: And so where did you live in Bronte?

AS: Well, when I was first living in Bronte I lived in a flat with two of the women that I had been living with in Randwick and it was in a building

that just really overlooked Maurie's house and of course we all used to go down to the beach together and all that sort of thing. But it was a very nice life, really, there because Bronte in the '60s was a very ordinary little suburb, very beautiful, but we walked to school with the kids and we all went down to the beach together, nobody locked their houses.

VM: So it was a very closed little community?

AS: It was a really good community and everyone knew each other and we went in and out of each other's houses, it was the days of progressive dinners. Do you remember – you wouldn't remember that.

VM: No, I know it.

AS: And we used to go around, go to somebody's for the first course and somebody's the second. Oh, dear, oh, dear, there was a lot of hilarity as well.

VM: So you knew everyone very well.

7.58 AS: Oh, you knew everyone, you knew everyone in the street, yes, in your little area because the beach divided the southern side from the northern side. And, of course, it was a very happy community, really. Gone. Too many millionaires moved in. Mind you, I'm the beneficiary and my children have benefited from the fact that Maurie Symonds bought the house in Bronte in the 1950s for two thousand six hundred pounds and because it had become so popular and desirable we sold it for 3.3 million.

VM: And when was that?

AS: In 2007.

VM: So a big change in values.

AS: Briefly, briefly I was a millionaire which actually enabled me to be in here.

VM: To buy an apartment here?

AS: M'mm.

VM: Just before we get onto that, tell me what led you into the upper house.

AS: Well, I'll make this as brief as possible. In 1966 Maurie had a sabbatical leave in London so took the three kids, three big kids, and

went to London. Like the whole world opens up when you get into a sophisticated, cultivated community like that as it was in the 1960s. And it was at the height of the Vietnam War which we were already involved in here but seeing the way of the coverage of it in the media in England was very enlightening about the nature of the war and how unacceptable it should have been to us to have been involved.

10.15 **VM: You mean that coverage wasn't here at all?**

AS: Not really, no, not at that time. Well, it hadn't been before we left and I think it then developed later in the '60s, of course, because at that time, unlike now, reporters went into the area as freelance, independent people, they weren't embedded with anyone so their reporting was real and uncensored. But, no, we became involved, Maurie and I became involved in the anti-war movement and, of course, when we came back to Bronte we also got involved in the fact that the local council was trying to establish a library in Waverley - we didn't have a library - and Maurie wrote a very convincing letter about the value of libraries in communities which the mayor used in his argument for supporting the establishment of the library. So that mayor, who was involved in the Labor Party, came to us and asked us if we wanted to be further involved in the Labor Party - that's how it started. Then I stood for local council - I was on Waverley Council. By this time I was involved in the Labor Women's Committee. Policies, policies, that's what we did in those days; we didn't actually do focus groups, we did policy work.

12.00 And so I was part of the Labor Women's Committee that worked on the Children's Services policy and because I was in local government I was able then when Whitlam got in to take advantage of my knowledge of how the funding would work. So we had so many children's services in Waverley that in fact they decided to cease the submission basis of getting them because we were so successful.

VM: What, because you were so organised and ready to go?

AS: Well, I knew where it was and how to get it, yes. And so I was only there for one term because for International Women's Year I had a baby boy which I thought was very amusing - I enjoyed that - so I retired at that stage and then we went off to London again for another sabbatical - all these wonderful experiences of travelling around.

VM: So when did you go to London again?

AS: 1979, '78. And then when I came back the party was looking for including women on the ticket for the upper house and I was on the

ticket for the upper house in the 1981 election and I didn't get in at that time because I was number nine on the ticket and then Peter Baldwin was desperate not to miss out on getting into the federal parliament after he'd spent all this time organising the numbers to get in there. And so he left the upper house – and of course I've really enjoyed this accidental parliamentary career – he left because if he had been in the house when Fraser called the election he would have been ineligible to stand, so he had to leave.

14.09 So he left in something like July or something and so then the party talked at length about who to put in in his place and because there was only like about eighteen months left of that period, I imagine the conversation was "Oh, well, we'll put her in and then when it comes to the next election we'll be able to choose somebody that we really want". And, of course, circumstances always seem to be that I just kept staying there.

VM: You got stuck in?

AS: In did, I did. And we had some wonderful, wonderful times with the women's movement in its broadest sense when Neville Wran was the premier because he had the Women's Office answerable to him.

VM: Directly, yes.

AS: He had the Arts, Aborigines, Ethnic Affairs and Women answerable to the premier and so he achieved an enormous amount of good things during that time. I don't think he actually realises the extent to which he changed so many people's lives because of the issues of domestic violence, setting up the women's legal centres, women's housing programme, there was a lot of good stuff.

VM: And you were particularly involved in those aspects, were you?

AS: M'mm.

VM: What were your particular issues that you took up?

15.59 AS: O.K, my particular issues. I always used to say I was interested in policy and programmes affecting women and their children and so I was always involved in looking at children's services because I started out thinking with my little baby girl needing to get into some preschool because there weren't a lot of children in Bronte at that time.

VM: So when was your daughter born?

AS: 1968. And just it went down the scale of privilege, really, from the privileged child going to the preschool to the children who were in out of home care, the children who were in foster care, the children who were in detention centres. So I was active in that children's area before I got in and continued to be interested in that. I was also then involved in women in prison stuff because when I first got in there the Women Behind Bars were very active. And so the prison issues have continued. The other thing that was so exciting that we did very well for a while was the Women's Housing Programme because the refuges that had arisen from the women's movement, well, there weren't enough and women were understanding that they could actually leave a violent situation and the refuges were just clogged.

VM: Temporary too, yes.

AS: Clogged, they were clogged; women were on waiting lists trying to get in; women were turned away. I used to remember this statistic in a Blacktown Refuge in the month of June in 1980 or something or other: there were forty one women and their ninety children turned away.

18.06 So we had this women's housing programme which was about moving them from the refuges into medium term supported accommodation with the aim of moving them into the permanent housing situation. And it was so exciting because we had a Women's Unit in the Department of Housing.

VM: Which hadn't been there before?

AS: No, no, no. Well, see, one of the things about the activism of the Women's Unit in the Premier's Department was there were Women's Units in every portfolio. But anyway, the one in the housing area was extraordinary because when we got some money, because we had to purchase or build the medium term supported ones to move them on, the Aboriginal project in Moree, the women from the Housing Department went up to Moree and planned the design of the house with the Aboriginal women there.

VM: Of the community.

AS: We had a great time and I remember I got into trouble once because one of the housing projects - we called it the Charmaine Cliff, which is still operating, amazingly - it was for women who were in and out of mental institutions or having bouts of mental illness to have the support in a housing situation with their children - and I can't remember the suburb where it was built.

20.03 **VM: That's in Sydney, was it?**

AS: It's in Sydney, yes. And, of course, it was built in an electorate of one of the blokes who was a bit upset that he wasn't playing a more prominent role, I think, when it was opened, because I opened it. I was an upstart, really; I didn't know my place, I don't think.

VM: Well, you were getting on with what you wanted to do.

AS: And there's still, I think, the Bea Miles place which is for inebriated women out in the Bondi area and I don't know what's happened to the rest of them but we were in the process of sort of having these particular medium term ones set up when we had a change of government and the women who had been on this committee with me said "Oh, Ann, Ann, we have to protect this women's housing project, so we think that we should give it to the only woman in the cabinet", which would mean taking it out of Housing and giving it to Virginia Chadwick who had Community Services and like "She's a woman, she'll look after it". Well, of course, she didn't have the authority. The men were dictating what was going to happen so we lost the women's housing thing.

VM: You lost the impetus. So that was after the Wran government, you were saying?

AS: Yes, yes, when Greiner came in. The first thing that Greiner did two days after he was elected – it was the 21st of March 1988 – he removed from the Premier's purview women, Aborigines, ethnic, the arts.

22.04 **VM: So it was a big change, yes.**

AS: Because he said it wasn't central to government. It's one of those phrases that I've always remembered.

VM: So were you able to carry on your work even though there was much less support?

AS: Not really, no, because it had gone, it had gone.

VM: But you were still in the upper house though?

AS: Oh, yes, yes, I was still there and I think I got involved in 1987. We set up an organisation called 'Women against Guns' and I spent a lot of time on that then because after the Hoddle Street murders in Victoria. And it was interesting because that actress called Diana Smith, she was one of the people who used to front our campaign against guns. But the men from the Bankers Union came to us and

said "It's our people in the banks who are quite often threatened with firearms, etcetera, so you can't just have women against guns", so it was changed to the Coalition for Gun Control which still exists but - - -

VM: Has a different overtone.

AS: Well, it's very difficult now to campaign on that issue because there's the Shooters Party representatives in the parliament here who are agitating constantly for their rights as shooters.

24.11 **VM: So you're juggling the two?**

AS: Yes, it is, it is. Anyway, I carried on. Then my other avenue of actually carrying on with my themes was the Greiner government established committees in the upper house, just two to start with, the Social Issues Committee was set up and the first chair of that was Max Willis, a Liberal, and the composition was government chair, opposition deputy and I was the deputy. And so Max and I worked very hard on the one thing that was just really, really good news to be involved in was getting adoption information.

VM: Finding out your family?

AS: Yes, because there'd been a lot of programmes had been set by women trying to actually locate their children and adoptees trying to contact their mothers, all that stuff, called Jigsaw and other organisations. So we actually go a reference to us to investigate that and it was extraordinary because it was an amazing change. There was opposition, of course. I particularly remember one woman who was very antagonistic to the proposal for information because her children, adopted children, had never known that they were adopted and she was extremely wealthy and she thought that in fact if the parents, natural parents, were contacted they would be after her money, of course. But anyway we got it through.

26.21 **VM: There were a lot of fears of that sort of thing?**

AS: Yes, there was.

VM: But you got it through so that was good.

AS: We got it through and I think there was a lot of protections in that people were contacted by a third party to say "Did you want contact?" and a lot of people really just wanted to know because of medical reasons because that terrible aloneness - - -

VM: Health issues.

AS: - - - and that pigmentosa(?) thing one woman was talking about, how she was afraid that - - -

VM: It was hereditary.

AS: Yes.

VM: That's good work.

AS: Anyway, we did that, then we started on drugs and we did tobacco and alcohol and then we got onto the illegal drugs.

VM: This was another committee?

AS: Yes, the whole reference to that committee, that collapsed. And then we did Juvenile Justice, we did rural suicide, it was a good mechanism for working, it really was.

VM: So the structure was you had a committee and then you heard submissions from people and worked through and introduced legislation?

AS: Well, no, we didn't produce legislation, we produced recommendations to the government for legislation and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. And in 1995 when Carr, when Labor came back in, then I was the chair, so I was keen to get references to the committee on the issues that I was interested in.

27.59

So we did children's advocacy and children of imprisoned parents and there was another one about school education stuff with bullying and that sort of thing. And the last one we did was the Hep C report which was fantastic, it was so good, and I saw Stuart Loveday the other day – he runs Hep C Council – and they're still going very strong.

VM: Thanks to your recommendations.

AS: Well, there was wonderful women who worked for me. That report was produced by a woman called Dr Jennifer Knight and she was extraordinary and I was just sitting at the top, saying "I want this, I want that. I don't like this, I don't like that" and she was an extraordinary researcher and writer and, of course, we argued at length in committee stages. For example, in the Children of Prisoners Report, I was very keen to have that as a unanimous report and it was because when people, Liberal Party, National Party, independent, looked at the consequences of imprisonment for children – one case that we heard of – well, we actually intervened in was a two year old boy who was on life support in the Children's

Hospital after the judge who'd sentenced his mother who it was suggested by the solicitor she would not receive a custodial sentence because it was a case of fraud, the company that she committed fraud against had accepted her reparation and her plan for paying back and she had this baby and the judge said "Oh, no, no. He's only two. He won't miss his mother".

30.15 He was on life support at the Children's Hospital in Randwick when we heard about the case and we actually got them united into one of the cottages where women could have their children. So it was a terrific report and the best speech in support of the recommendations was made by the National Party man and, I mean, those sorts of things were very precious really.

VM: Really working together for a good cause, a good outcome.

AS: Yes, yes, yes. But then when it's ultimately dependent on the government to make the response, well, by 1998 after I'd done the all-party select committee inquiry into the injecting room which failed suddenly thought "I am fifty eight. My father died when he was fifty eight. Do I really need to spend more time in here when I could do other things?"

VM: So you go out?

AS: I left. And people would say to me – like one of the Liberals said to me down in the carpark, "Now, Ann, I hear you're leaving". I said "Yeah, yeah. Too hard, it's too hard" I said "and too many disappointments and he said "But you could just stay here. You've got another three years; you could stay here, just collect your money and go and sit on the backbench".

32.00 Can you imagine me sitting there and not saying anything? Dear, oh, dear. Anyway, I'd already had a stroke when I was fifty and I thought "Oh, look, I can't bear the tension. Just go away".

VM: So you retired from it, yes, but you're still active.

AS: Well, I actually wasn't after that because my husband became ill and my mother had needs of a lot of care so I actually did all that.

VM: Had time for them?

AS: Yes, yes. And I didn't start up again until recently.

VM: That's really interesting, hearing about that.

AS: Well, I met some wonderful, wonderful people. I don't regret anything about being in there. I had some extraordinary experiences and met some amazing people that I never would have met if I hadn't actually been in that place. I mean, I just keep thinking where Helen Clark is now. Helen Clark is one of the most extraordinary women I've ever met. She was amazing the way that she actually rebuilt the Labor Party in New Zealand and now she's doing extraordinary work in the UN.

VM: People carry on.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: Well, that was really interesting to know. And then just coming back to you said you had the house in Bronte and then you sold it. And then had you decided "O.K, I'm going to move to an apartment" or were you open-minded at that point? What made you decide to move here to the Astor or were you looking around at all sorts of places?

33.56 AS: I did look at a few places but I was quite clear about the fact that I didn't want to live in a house when I couldn't afford that. Well, I couldn't move out of this locality. I mean, this is where everything that I'm interested in is, very close by.

VM: In the CBD, yes.

AS: I walk down to the Opera House for music and theatre, I walk over to the art gallery, walk in the gardens, walk up to the back door at parliament house and go into the library up there. It's just ideal for me and apart from that I'm a person who I really need to feel secure where I live and I love the fact that I'm on the eighth floor and it's a secure building.

VM: So that's really important for you, a feeling of security?

AS: Yes. Well, by the time I was on my own in the house in Bronte, the suburb had changed and there were a lot of cars, fast cars whizzing around there, that wonderful scenic drive - we're right on the point there, looking at the beach - and I just didn't feel safe there. And, of course, being on your own in a two-storey house it just was obscene, really. And, of course, I remember when I first came to Sydney, walking around here and I walked past this building in 1960 - - -

VM: The Astor, yes.

AS: - - - and thought “Oh, wouldn’t it be wonderful to live in a place like that”.

VM: Your dream came true.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: So tell me about the process then of looking here. So did you see an apartment advertised, did you have to apply?

36.06 AS: Oh, yes. No, no, it’s interesting, I did, and I thought “I could afford that” and so I rang this agent and there were two names on the advertisement. I rang the second name of the agent – it’s very interesting – so I came in to see that and you know the formulation of this place, it’s one and three at the front and two and four at the back.

VM: Four on each floor?

AS: Yes. Four on Level 12.

VM: Is that the top floor, Level 12?

AS: Yes. And so when I came in somebody had done this wonderful designer renovation and all that, so it was open space, open space. When you walked in the front door there was a small, very small, kitchen like a galley kitchen. No, sorry, first of all there’s the bedroom. The bedroom was only about as big as this space here from the lamp, fitted with a queen-sized bed.

VM: And that was it?

AS: Yes. And then a little kitchen and a bathroom and was all this wonderful entertainment area. But I said to the agent “Oh, I couldn’t live in a place as small as this”.

VM: How big had your house been in Bronte?

AS: Well, it was an ordinary bungalow, three bedroom house, and then of course with three children that was all right and then four children and then five children, so it just sort of grew and went up.

38.16 **VM: How much older were Maurice’s children than yours?**

AS: Well, when I taught them they were eight and I married him when they were eleven and actually by the time Rachel was born Cathy was about to go to university. Of course the two girls, the twins were a girl and a boy and the elder was a girl and the girls didn’t want to share a bedroom any more, so we had three bedrooms for the three big ones and then our bedroom and then a bedroom for the baby and

the verandah, back verandah, the kitchen, the dining room, the lounge room and then we went upstairs eventually. David was born in 1975 and so that was all transformed internally again, so we had two bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs and like two and a half bathrooms and huge.

VM: Yes, you needed all that.

AS: Lots and lots of area with furniture and paintings and books. One of the fellows that came to help me sort of get the house fixed for selling used to refer to what we used to think was the dining room, he used to call it the library because it was just books, all books.

VM: What, all around the walls?

AS: Yes, books.

40.01 **VM:** You were both great readers?

AS: Oh, yes. But Maurie, when he left the college in the days when you had to retire when you were sixty five or sixty or something, then he took up a role of offering a programme in Australian studies for American students who were in their second college year or something – I don't understand the American system very well – but they used to come out here for their second semester and he would arrange all of the courses in Australian literature, Australian art, Australian history, Australian economics, Australian architecture, tralala, and put the students in families, etcetera. Well, the consequences for this was it gave him things to do, of course, but the major thing was that every year he would go to the college, the university, which the university was providing this opportunity, he would go there to report and to talk about the future programme in Florida. Well, he would spend about five days in Florida. Like he'd leave on Boxing Day and he wouldn't come back till his birthday in February. He'd be in London, New York. The kids and I used to call it his London, New York, Paris and Rome trip and he'd go to Moscow. But the thing is that he used to buy all these wonderful books in New York and he'd send them out by ship because it was easier. But the books, I go into the art gallery over there and I look at this huge Van Gogh that's there in the member's library there and I think – see, I gave them all away.

42.06 **VM:** What, all his books?

AS: Well, I had to. How could I fit it in here? I got the furniture removalist in and did a run around the five children and it's like the chaise longue and the chairs that matched, with the lovely French silk cover

on it, that went to one child, then the hall stand went to the next one and then all the bedroom furniture and the cedar wardrobes went to the other and paintings went everywhere as well. And just it was extraordinary getting out of the house and the thing is that I sent boxes and boxes and boxes to 2MBS-FM and I feel terrible about it now.

VM: Is this books or records?

AS: Books and records, yes, and I kept a lot but the books that I think about are all the classics that he had at university, lovely little hardback classics that he had at university when he's doing his first arts degree. And then there was his interest in the arts.

VM: What, you regret not having them now?

AS: Well, I couldn't, really, but I think about it. And one of my friends said to me "Ann, 2MBS-FM's having their book sale. Do you want to go out and get some of your books back?"

VM: Buy them back.

43.53 AS: But where would I put them, where would I put them? And I said to the kids "Come and choose a couple of the art books" because there's the History of Impressionism. Oh, it was beautiful, all that sort of stuff. Anyway, they all took a couple and then I packed them all up and all the art stuff and there were magazines and little brochures and things that are out of print, of course. And my Michael, who's the one I taught in third grade, he's a lecturer in the humanities at the University of Western Sydney, so he took all the boxes of the art stuff out to the University of Western Sydney. And, interestingly, the person who received them had been a pupil of Maurie's and so she was going to get a bookplate and put it in there. But Michael told me she was so excited to find all these other little magazines on Eskimo art and stuff like that.

VM: A wonderful collection.

AS: Yes, yes. Anyway, I hope somebody's enjoying it. And then he was always mad on films as well and we were just trying to say recently "What was that film with Joan Fontaine? He's not here, he can't tell us" because he knew that sort of thing.

VM: He would remember, yes.

AS: And that's one of those personal things you need to put out there. But anyway, yes, I put all the film books, got all the film books. And,

of course, he had all these film posters that we used to have framed and they were up in what we used to call the phone room, lovely old film posters of a Julius Caesar film. I gave all that to Tom, our friend, Tom, and then I gave all the photography books to Matthew.

46.08 **VM: You had a lot to give out?**

AS: It was incredible, it was incredible.

VM: Did it take you a long time to go through that process?

AS: Oh, yes, yes, it did. I mean, fortunately then because when I was going to buy I made an offer on another place here after I said I couldn't live there, couldn't live there.

VM: Number 4 was too small, yes.

AS: And I was in the process of I'd made an offer which had been accepted on Level 3.

VM: And what number was that?

AS: 2.

VM: And did it have a lot of rooms?

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: Because they're all quite different, aren't they?

AS: Yes, they are, they are.

VM: So you were poised?

AS: And it was beautifully done up, yes, so I put the house at Bronte on the market and the agent who was managing the sale here, he took over that in conjunction with one of the nicest real estate agents I've ever met who lives at Bronte and has an agency in Clovelly and they were managing the sale of Bronte and then in the middle of all of this, having put it on the market the vendors here withdrew. Well, I'm the lucky person out of all that, so the agency at "Your house is going to be sold. You've got to go somewhere", so I rented the one that I said I couldn't live in.

VM: The too small one, yes.

AS: Yes. And I was up there for about four or five months and this came on the market.

48.11 **VM: And you knew?**

AS: I didn't see it, actually. A friend of mine, one of my old friends in Bronte said "I can see there's another one on the market". So I came down here and spoke to this woman.

VM: And that was right?

AS: Yes.

VM: So how big is this one, how many rooms does this have?

AS: Well, you don't want to get up and have a look? I'll tell you.

VM: Yes. No, I'm happy to. So we just had a quick look around and so you have - - -

AS: Two bedrooms.

VM: - - - two bedrooms, one beautiful large one facing east.

AS: See the moon come up.

VM: You see the moon come up. And the sun, presumably, in the morning?

AS: Oh, yes, yes.

VM: And then a bathroom and a second bedroom.

AS: Second bedroom is usually habitable – not at the moment - because one of my stepdaughters lives in Blackheath and she often comes down and stays the night here, which is good, and it's all just there for if one of my brothers comes down to Sydney. It's good to have a second bedroom, yes.

VM: To put up a friend or relative.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: And you've got a little kitchen.

AS: Which is unspeakable, unspeakable.

VM: But to be rearranged.

AS: It's waiting to be renovated.

VM: So that's sort of my next question is have you done much to the apartment since you came?

AS: No, not yet. I put bookcases in the front and a wardrobe along the passageway there.

VM: A built-in wardrobe?

50.00 AS: Yes, but that's it. But the real issue is to get the kitchen and the bathroom in a functional way to my liking. See, the other issue is for me here I feel as though I'm living in one room.

VM: Because it's open from the front door, you mean?

AS: Yes, yes. And I like the idea of being in rooms, in closed doors. So I don't know whether I can reconstitute a room here somewhere.

VM: A doorway?

AS: Yes. Because somebody's actually just gutted the whole area here. I've been in other, 3's, which actually are separate rooms.

VM: So this one's been deliberately opened up like this?

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: And so you probably could put it back if you wanted?

AS: Yes. Never mind. It's spacious as well so that's good.

VM: And it lets the light run through. I guess that's why they did it, perhaps.

AS: Yes. Yes, it'd be a bit dark up there if you actually closed it off, wouldn't it? Never mind.

VM: And some of the rooms look out onto the – what do you call that, the lightwell?

AS: Stairwell. No, not the stairwell, the lightwell.

VM: Lightwell.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: Where all the functions of the building go.

AS: Yes.

VM: The grey water pipes and - - -

AS: Sewer

VM: - - - and air conditioners all tucked in between apartments.

AS: Yes.

VM: Is it noisy out that side?

AS: Well, when they were redoing the windows here and so all this was partitioned off for them to work on the windows I slept in the back bedroom and I did find the air conditioners problematic.

VM: What, because they're humming?

AS: Well, they start and they stop, so it's start-up noise.

VM: And then it stops, yes.

AS: So the rules are that you're supposed to have them turned off at ten o'clock at night but rules are rules, aren't they?

52.04 **VM: Yes, I wondered about rules. Are there a lot of rules about living here?**

AS: Yes, there are. Well, I mean the interesting thing is first of all that it's a company title building, which means that you present yourself to the board.

VM: So before you could come and live here?

AS: Yes.

VM: Even when you were renting you had to come and present?

AS: Yes.

VM: So tell me what you had to do.

AS: Well, you had to be interviewed. Well, actually I was interviewed because I was going to buy a place on Level 3 and three references I required. So coming from a country town but being in Sydney for as long as I had my references were – I laugh, I laugh – from a judge, a professor of medicine and a banker.

VM: You were well set up.

AS: I thought it was hilarious.

VM: And then did you have to have an interview as well?

AS: Yes, yes, by one of the directors of the board, two of the directors of the board.

VM: So not the whole board interviews you?

AS: No, no.

VM: Just a couple of people?

AS: Yes. And I don't know, really, what the purpose of it is now that I have done the same thing - - -

VM: You've now interviewed people, yes.

AS: - - - as I've now interviewed people because it's really about – I mean, no one has ever been told “I'm sorry, you can't come here”. But there are restrictions in that. So people who may want to bring a pet in find we don't allow pets in here and so they will decide, well, they don't want to come in.

54.03 The other thing is that I found that people say at interview that they intend to live here but then they don't, they rent.

VM: What, they sublet?

AS: They sublet. But you can't do anything about that. But the main thing about the interviews prior to starting the building works here on the renovations was to say to the people “This is going to happen. Do you really want to be here when this is happening? This will be the process, this is how much it'll cost and these are the conditions that we will work under”.

VM: Yes. So things like the apartment being divided up because the windows are worked on?

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: And as far as the financial side, was it that the current residents had to contribute to the renovations or was there like a fund that had built up?

AS: No, there wasn't a fund. There was some funding, there was a sinking fund. There's like a management fund, an administration fund and a sinking fund and there was a special levy and the special levy, as far as I can remember was something like a hundred and three thousand which for me was interesting because I say to people “Yes, I'm living with a lot of millionaires now but I'm not one of them”. [break in recording] is my neighbour.

VM: So people have to have some extra funds in order to be able to stay here - - -

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: - - - except in the period of renovations? So it was good to warn them?

56.04 AS: And some people, actually when they were aware of the extent of the special levy actually decided to leave.

VM: A bit too much for them, yes. And are the renovations finished now or is it going over several years?

AS: This was called the façade project. That's finished except for the windows on the artist's studio downstairs on the ground floor. They haven't been done yet because they had to be specially manufactured in Melbourne in a style that was suitable for the original look of the Astor. And we're getting a new carpet in the hallway because that red carpet is totally inappropriate to the beautiful wood that's been restored now. There's just a few little things like that.

VM: And who decides on the new carpet? The board choose the colour?

AS: Yes, yes. But we have a heritage architect adviser and we have a lot of particular advice in the areas of engineering and design.

VM: Yes, there'd be a lot of specialist management over something like this.

AS: Yes, yes. This is why Trevor Scott is so good, because of the detail that he actually applies to it.

VM: He's the chair of the board?

AS: He's great, he's great. And so we had an interesting discussion about the colour and design of the carpet and the runner in the hallway because one of the members of the board thought that one of the colour features was too pink, so the whole thing's been redone.

58.07 **VM: Colour is very difficult, isn't it, too because no two people see it quite the same?**

AS: Sorry, that's actually terracotta, it's not pink.

VM: That's what I mean.

AS: Yes.

VM: If you said "That's green" and somebody says "No, it's brown".

AS: Yes. Anyway, that's been settled.

VM: Yes. I can imagine that's quite complex, yes.

AS: I got a message from the architect, the heritage architect, saying "The carpet people have been in and they're suggesting that this particular

marking be in a burgundy colour". And I said "Well, I might see burgundy as being more blue".

VM: It could go on, couldn't it?

AS: No. I said "Please, just order the colour and get down to it".

VM: Yes.

AS: Yes. But then we're being very careful at the moment now because of the cost of all this façade stuff but we really want to get the lightwells done too but trying to limit the cost.

VM: Of repairing or renovating all that part, all those functions.

AS: It needs to be done, yes. It has to be very careful, yes.

VM: Big expenditure.

AS: So it's not finished yet but I hope I live long enough to see the whole building finished, including my kitchen and bathroom.

VM: Inside your bit and outside all over?

AS: M'mm.

VM: You mentioned an artist's studio. Is that let to an artist?

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: So it's specifically set aside for that?

AS: I think it used to be – I don't know what it used to be.

VM: Well, there were a whole lot of shops, weren't there?

AS: There was a café there, there was a little café there, apparently, yes.

VM: Because when these were designed they were called serviced apartments, weren't they?

AS: M'mm.

VM: And I wondered, are there any services still in the building?

AS: No.

VM: Nothing?

AS: No. I mean, what exists still is the dumbwaiter shaft which - - -

60.07 **VM: Meals used to come up.**

AS: - - - you used to be able to order stuff from the restaurant because there was a restaurant downstairs, yes. And I've seen other information about where to leave your laundry to be collected on a certain day, all that stuff. Well, that's all gone.

VM: So it's just historic signage now?

AS: Yes, yes, that's right.

VM: And you have a caretaker position or not?

AS: Well, we have a person who is called the concierge now because I think he came in as a caretaker and then his functions were changed and he's now called a concierge but he is absolutely superb in his understanding of the history and knowledge of the building and he's really like a building manager. But he is here from – well, actually we've got another person here on a Monday now and he just does his four days, Tuesday to Friday.

VM: So he doesn't live here?

AS: Yes, he does.

VM: He lives here but he's on duty four days?

AS: He just does eight o'clock to four o'clock every day but he's extraordinarily valuable because of his understanding of the building, the history of the building and also his, I'd have to say, affection for the building, really. So, yes, he's extraordinarily valuable.

VM: And does he assist with, say you want someone to come and put some hooks on the wall so you can hang pictures, is that the sort of thing that he's able to say "Oh, well, I know there's someone who will come"?

62.01 AS: Well, he could. Yes, he's got a whole list of things down there, like plumbers and electricians and that sort of thing and, of course, when I first started to inquire about my kitchen he suggested an architect who was actually a friend of Jan Roberts. So the architect has been in here and designed the plans for both kitchen and the bathroom and now the problem is getting a builder that I can afford.

VM: To do the work?

AS: Yes. The two quotes that I got were astronomical and he explained that in terms of the fact that because you can only work in here from eight till four, Monday to Friday, a lot of builders would like to start at seven and finish at six, six days a week, and the other thing is that

they also have a perception of the ability to pay from somebody who's living in here as well.

VM: So the price goes up, yes.

AS: Yes, yes. But anyway I will persist until I find - - -

VM: You'll get your kitchen eventually.

AS: Yes, yes. Oh, dear, never mind.

VM: So just coming back to noise, does noise make you feel irritated or comfortable? I mean, is it good to know that there are other people around?

AS: Oh, noises worry me terribly.

VM: Do they, you don't like them?

AS: Well, I mean, I'm anxious as soon as I hear a noise that I am not familiar with. So now I'm familiar with the fire alarms because they go off all the time. The first time it went off I panicked terribly. I was up there on the twelfth floor and I got my handbag and I got my phone and I started to walk down.

VM: Go down the stairs.

63.59 AS: Yes. And there was a fellow on level 12 up there as well and I said to him "Mark, what's happening?" He said "Oh, Ann", he said "it goes off all the time. Don't worry" he said, "we just wait till it goes away". Well, I mean it does so that's fine.

VM: Now you know.

AS: I know that. But any other noise that I'm not familiar with – it's funny because one of my cousins and I talk about these things we have in common. One of our apprehensions is one of them: "What's that?"

VM: So you're very alert to unusual sounds?

AS: Yes. But I feel totally comfortable here because of being on the eighth floor.

VM: On a high floor, yes.

AS: Yes.

VM: And it seems internally quite quiet anyway.

AS: Yes, it is.

VM: Do you get a lot of noise from the street? I mean, you're in the middle of the city after all. Does that worry you?

AS: Well, not really. I suppose you become accustomed to it after a while. I can hear the garbage trucks coming around at night – they come about two or three o'clock in the morning – but that doesn't worry me, that doesn't worry me at all. The only noises that you think "Oh, won't it be good when it stops" is if they have some rock concerts in the Domain or something like that.

VM: It carries over here?

AS: Yes, yes, that's all right.

VM: It's occasional.

AS: Yes. But, no, it is a very solid building and one doesn't hear the noises from other people's apartment although sometimes I think when I'm playing music I might be playing it a bit too loudly although I haven't had any complaints.

VM: Nobody's said anything?

AS: No, no.

VM: That's a good sign. They'd probably say, yes. Yes, I wondered too about common areas in the apartment block because there's a garden on the roof, is there?

66.04 AS: No garden but I'll take you up there to have a look.

VM: There's a roof space?

AS: Yes, a rooftop venue you could say. Yes, it's very, very nice but it's the subject of a lot of, well, concern because one of the things that I think has happened in the last, well, certainly the last five years that I've been here there's more young people here and it's a great party venue but we have rules. This is one of the things I was going to say about the interviews with prospective buyers. It's about explaining what the rules are, of what's expected of people who are living in here, and so one of the rules is about who can have a function of a certain number up on the roof between what time.

VM: Right, so it's restricted by number and hours?

AS: Yes, except it's recently a couple of young people who said they were having like twenty five people had about fifty and somebody had to go

up and tell them at half past eleven or something or other they had to actually - - -

VM: Go home.

AS: Yes, yes. So it is a problem because people who have lived here for twenty years or so at a time when the building was really peopled by a lot of elderly people and it was quiet it's a change.

VM: A bit of a shock, yes.

AS: It is a change.

VM: So is that the only common area, the rooftop?

AS: M'mm.

VM: And do you meet people in the corridors and in the lift?

68.01 AS: Yes, yes.

VM: And do you all know each other, is it social?

AS: Well, yes. Not all because it's quite a large group and they've changed recently. I mean, certainly coming from the country I'm the person who says hello to everyone, talk to taxi drivers - my children say to me "Oh, please stop talking to the taxi driver". So I think I know most of what we call shareholders, the owners.

VM: Who actually live here?

AS: Yes. But I don't know all of them as far as the fact that there are an increasing number of young people here who, I think some of them are the children of owners who are here. And I don't know everybody but we do all say "Good morning" or "The weather's horrible" or "What a lovely weekend or something".

VM: What everyone says, yes.

AS: Yes, no, we do all that sort of thing. I like that. It's almost like it's a substitute for like the street that I lived in, when I walk down the street at Bronte. I knew everybody in that street and you'd be standing in the street and chatting or somebody was in the yard. Well, it's the same sort of feeling here. It's good, it's a good feeling.

VM: And with the people living here, you've mentioned that there are more young people now and I wondered is there a strong gender balance one way or the other? Are there more women, single women, are there more single men, are there more couples,

retired people, working people, is there any particular profile that you notice.

70.05 AS: Well, I think it's the whole lot, which is like a little suburban mix, really, because there are older retired people and then there are young couples who are practising lawyers or bankers. So I don't know of any other single woman; I think I'm the only single woman living in here.

VM: And what about children, any young children?

AS: Actually, there is a woman with a little girl down on level 5, a dear little girl who looks like primary school age, about seven or eight. And there's a couple, level 1, who've just had twins about a year ago.

VM: So it is quite a cross-section, there's all ages?

AS: Oh, yes, yes, it is, it is. And, of course, we have – I'm reluctant to mention individuals' names but [break in recording] who is currently producing a paper, policy paper for the federal government. Well, he has two apartments here; I believe it's mostly for his art collection.

VM: Lucky paintings.

AS: I never see him in the building.

VM: You'll have to get an introduction. So do you feel very private in your apartment?

AS: Yes, I do and I like that.

72.03 **VM: That was important to you?**

AS: Oh, yes. The only intrusion, of course, is the telephone. And my dear baby boy has done something very useful for me. He's organised caller recognition thing in it so I can see - - -

VM: Whether you want to answer or not.

AS: Yes, that's right, or if somebody leaves a message that I can wait till tomorrow because I haven't got as much energy as I used to have. Usually by about five o'clock in the afternoon I think "Oh, that's enough for one day, that's enough for one day". I'm not paid employment but I am on about - - -

VM: You're still on committees?

AS: - - - about four or five committees in a voluntary capacity which I can't let go of yet because it's still women and children.

VM: It's an abiding interest.

AS: Well, I'm chairing a committee called Women's Advisory Council in the prisons and last week when I was not feeling very well a deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner decided to drive me home. And I said to him, "Look, I just think I've got about another year to go". – I'll be seventy three in July – but I just want to get as much mileage as I can out of the fact that I can still knock on doors and ask for meetings. For example, I'm working on a particular project and I just had a letter from the Attorney Generals Department to say "Please arrange to meet my policy adviser, So and So".

74.16 Well, you see, it's because of where I was for so many years, with a reputation of being interested in those things. I want to keep having a go.

VM: Yes, while you can still have effect. Why not?

AS: Yes, yes. You see, I will give up eventually.

VM: You'll do something.

AS: But I think it's important to keep doing things. One year I said to Maurie when he's book buying, I said to him "I want the complete Proust. I haven't read Proust".

VM: You still haven't?

AS: I just got the first volume out the other day and I thought "I've got to start".

VM: It's a real daunting challenge, isn't it? Ten volumes waiting.

AS: I know, I know. Anyway, I love books.

VM: You have to get past the first chapter or whatever it is.

AS: I love books, I love the feel of books. I sometimes buy books just because of the look of them.

VM: They feel so nice, yes. So you want to keep doing things. And is living here helpful in that way too?

AS: Yes, yes. Head office of the Prisons Department is just up at Central and I just get the bus up there and all these government offices are around here.

VM: Having an apartment, because after all you had a house, a big house, and now you've got an apartment, what differences have you noticed in your lifestyle now that you're in an apartment?

76.01 AS: Well, I think it's very different because in the house with the husband and the children there are all those domestic duties that necessarily demand a regimentation. I don't have the regimentation because it's just me and if I don't want to eat, don't want to cook a meal, I don't. And I am alone but I'm not lonely and, I mean, it's a very big change for being involved with – see, my oldest children, my stepchildren, they've got children so they're my grandchildren and now my son's married and he's got a grandchild. So I've had big involvement with all of the family always and so it is a big change, really, for me to just be sitting here. It's interesting, when I was leaving Bronte one of my little nieces said to me "Ann, whatever you do, you've got to take the dining room table with you" because we're always around the dining room table. I did four courses for eighty people for Maurie for his fiftieth birthday and I did the kids' birthday parties and their weddings and so it's an amazing change, it really is. It was a bit of a shock, really, in the first couple of years. I'm really now just settling into accepting of it, really.

78.05 **VM: And we've just mentioned the dining room table. Looks very large. What, seats twelve people or even more?**

AS: Yes, I've got another piece that fits in there.

VM: Yes, so it is.

AS: It sits a lot of people. And how many chairs do you think I've got?

VM: I can see it, by the dozen at a glance.

AS: Yes, exactly.

VM: So it was a big change but did you feel a freedom to be a different sort of person. You've described your role in the house with a big family.

AS: It's not just a freedom, it's a challenge, really. I wouldn't think of it as being a freedom because it sounds like you were shackled to another existence. I didn't feel shackled in that existence but I do think it's quite a challenge to adapt to seeing yourself in a different role because I was the person who did all the mothering sort of family stuff.

VM: And did you do all the house stuff too in the sense of managing the house and garden?

AS: Not really.

VM: Not so much, no.

AS: Not really, no, because I love other people's gardens. The only thing that was in our garden was herbs, a lemon tree, beautiful, beautiful frangipani tree which must have been about eighty years old and a bulldozer came into the front, the developer who bought it, bulldozed from the front to the back but we've all got a piece of the frangipani tree.

80.02 Well, I haven't got it here but my son's got one. My eldest, Cathy, the eldest, took I don't know how many pieces of the tree and struck them all and everyone's got a piece of the tree.

VM: An offshoot.

AS: And Rachel just sent me a photograph. She's bought a little house in Newtown with a very small garden but she's got the frangipani tree blooming.

VM: So you don't grow anything here?

AS: No.

VM: There's nowhere to grow?

AS: No.

VM: Are people allowed to grow stuff on the rooftop?

AS: No, no. Well, the Botanic Gardens has a wonderful herb garden

VM: Very useful, yes. Yes, I suppose you've got one of the biggest gardens imaginable.

AS: Yes, "I like your front garden" people say to me, yes.

VM: Do you spend a lot of time there?

AS: I do, I do. I walk there every morning and I take a particular interest in how many new ducks are there. I'd like to find out where the frogmouth is because I've had this wonderful experience of seeing baby frogmouths. You know those frogmouth owls who don't move? They look like the trunk of the tree when they're sitting there.

VM: Yes, they sort of blend in, yes.

AS: Well, the little babies, of course, don't know that. They're just like great big feather puffballs with their little eyes, actually look over the top of the nest.

VM: How wonderful.

AS: Yes, I just love it and I'm very keen, of course, on supporting the management getting rid of the bats because I have seen in five years three major trees destroyed and removed.

VM: What, because the bats have eaten all the foliage?

AS: The bats, yes. Well, they ringbark the tree, that's what happens.

82.00 **VM: What, how they hang on?**

AS: That's the way they cling on. They ringbark the trees so they actually have to be taken out. So I hope that there'll be a successful relocation of them because there's a red cedar down there that they've actually denuded down about its top third and you think "It's been there for a hundred and fifty years".

VM: We don't want to lose these wonderful old trees.

AS: No, no. I love the gardens, I do love the gardens but I'm not a gardener myself.

VM: But you can enjoy them even if you're not.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: And are there any other spots that you particularly enjoy around here or is that your main? You've mentioned going to the art gallery.

AS: Yes, yes. Well, the places I frequent around here is the wonderful café over here in the Museum of Sydney and then there's a wonderful bar down here in the Sir Stamford. I don't know whether you know of that bar that's at the end of that building which was actually formerly a building of the New South Wales Health Department.

VM: This one just over here?

AS: Just down here.

VM: Yes, I know the building. I don't know the bar.

AS: Well, you should go. When I take my friends down there to have a look at it, if I could take them in there for coffee or a drink or you can have a light meal in there, there's New South Wales Health

Department in sandstone over the top of it but it abuts the Sir Stamford Hotel and they have actually got a lease on it. So I like that sort of - - -

84.00 **VM: Juxtaposition.**

AS: And of course I've got the Opera Quays Cinema.

VM: Very handy, yes. And you mentioned the Opera House too

AS: Yes, yes. See, I'm a subscriber. I used to say to my kids that I had married Maurie Symonds because he had blue series tickets to the SSO which was in the Town Hall.

VM: Town Hall in those days, yes.

AS: So I've been an SSO subscriber for a long time. And I subscribe down here too. There's a couple of friends, Tom Uren and two of my female friends, and so I walk down and then they have all this trauma of getting there in the car, getting in the bus, Tom has to get out and get his ferry on time. I just stroll up the street; I love it.

VM: And you know exactly how long it'll take regardless of traffic.

AS: I know And, see, the other thing about that is that a couple of months ago I had had a hectic day – I think it was actually a Friday night - and I knew that there was a particular performance I was interested in down there and I hadn't subscribed for it but I thought "I'll just go down". I just went down, got a ticket.

VM: On spec, wonderful.

AS: It was lovely. Look, I really feel privileged having that opportunity to do that sort of stuff.

VM: Can be very spontaneous too.

AS: Yes, yes. And because I haven't got my kitchen used to cooking so much I've got these wonderful places to eat like the Gardens Restaurant.

86.05 **VM: Plenty on your doorstep.**

AS: Yes, yes. And I've got the Conservatorium concerts across the road. My stepson Michael's son, Jack, just graduated there with the University Medal in music.

VM: So you can go and hear him?

AS: He's in London now.

VM: Lucky him. And what makes a home for you? Is it things or furniture or when you were coming here and you brought things with you was it the things that you brought with you?

AS: Well, the things that I've brought with me that I'm really happy to live with is like the accumulation of my life, really; that's what's so interesting to me. And when I look around at the paintings, I know – I've had a call from Dennis the other day, I'm still in touch with Dennis and Brett. I hope to see Brett when I go north. He's sitting up on a mountaintop up in the Tweed Valley, painting, and Arthur McIntyre – he's died now. It's just all these things remind us of where I've been and who I've been with and that series there - - -

VM: The prints?

AS: - - - yes, Maurie bought when we were in London in 1978. We were living just near Regents Park.

VM: Yes, I can see that church near the BBC.

87.58 AS: Yes, yes. When David was three I used to take him up to a kindergarten – it was just near the BBC – he used to go there from nine till twelve in the morning. So I loved that, walking around in there.

VM: Pictures have a lot of associations, yes.

AS: I mean, I'm not wedded to things, it's what things represent. It's not that I'm wedded to things for their own sake. I've got in boxes up there in that built-in wardrobe, I've got a series of etchings that were done in Rome in 1798 or something or other – I can't remember the details – and they are just gorgeous and in the house at Bronte Maurie had had them – it was a book originally – he'd had them separated and framed – it was a book of etchings, Jason and the Argonauts and these twenty four of them used to be across the wall in the lounge room and then he found out in fact there are only about four complete sets left in the world and he was going to sell them. And he wanted to take them to New York once and I said "You are not going to take them to New York. You can take photocopies of them". Anyway, he never got around to doing it so they're up there in a box.

90.00 Now, I will have to think about what to do with them because it's a bit silly of them being there in a box. When we break and stop talking I'll show you one of the type of them that I've got there. And, of course,

the kids have all got some of them the same and, God, when I read – accidentally picked a book out of the shelves last year some time - about Goethe on art and just reading the first couple of pages, Goethe used to collect this fellow.

VM: The same artist?

AS: Yes, yes. Look, I love knowing those sorts of things and I feel bad about the fact that I should be doing something about perhaps selling them and using the money to create a scholarship in Maurie's memory; I should do something like that. I would actually like somebody to write up his history in art in New South Wales because he was responsible - with others but he was the head of the college – he was aware that in the teaching profession art teachers who had diplomas of art were not regarded on the same career path of advancement as people who had degrees. So he worked to create the degree in art education and he was able to receive the first lot of in that. Well, it's a major contribution and I feel that maybe I should – see, I wouldn't know, go to Sotheby's or Christie's.

92.13

It's interesting because they're beautifully done, beautifully restored and a couple of years ago I was in London with a friend, dear friend of ours, who took me 'round to the library, British Library, and they had one of these copies and it was still in the book form and they apparently just turn the book over every week, another page, and I went to see them and it's not because they've bleached them.

VM: The lighting?

AS: They've bleached them. And these ones were by a specialist so the colour is - - -

VM: So they're much better.

AS: The paper quality is still there.

VM: Well, it's lovely to have them and I guess there's a lot of associations for you with them too because you had them in your home.

AS: Yes, yes. But, see, the last time he had them restored he said he wouldn't put them up on the wall again because the light might - - -

VM: Spoil them, yes.

AS: - - - particularly the light is light in Bronte, you know what it's like. The biggest impact on me coming back from Europe, London, in 1966

was the light. It's so harsh to come back to the light here in November.

VM: From London and have this big contrast.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: And is there a time or a thing that makes you feel most at home? Like do you feel at home, sitting looking at the view?

AS: Comfortable here?

VM: Yes.

93.58 AS: Yes, I love it in the afternoons, in the late afternoons and I can just sit here with a glass of wine and look out the window, I love it. I love the change in the light and I leave the curtains open for as long as I can.

VM: To enjoy it?

AS: Yes, and it's just to sit quietly and look out there and think "Oh, gosh, I'm just so lucky to be looking at all that". I love it, I just love it. And I'm not normally an early morning person but I've become more early morning here and I love to get up and I can see where the sun is rising now and it moves. I didn't realise until I lived here that it moved.

VM: No, unless you've got a horizon you don't.

AS: That's right, yes, I was watching it rise in different places. Yes, I'm not exactly au fait with scientific knowledge.

VM: Well, new places bring new insights and being high up too you get to see a lot more.

AS: Have you seen the book that they've done of the Astor?

VM: That John Roberts did?

AS: Yes.

VM: Yes, I have. Yes, I enjoyed looking at that. So all in all it sounds as though you're really enjoying being here in an apartment.

95.45 AS: I couldn't imagine my life having reached this plane of satisfaction. Really, that's how I think of it - it's extraordinary. Because there's also, I think, a wonderful stage of contentment too as, I mean, I spent a lot of my early life in turmoil of one kind or another and that's gone, that's gone. It's not that I'm not affected by personal and public conflicts and incidents or events but it's nice to have a feeling of

distance from them and not a feeling of urgency about being responsible to participate in them. And after I've said that, of course, I'm interfering in all sorts of things but I have a different attitude to it. I just do what I'm capable of doing in the time. I don't make extra demands of myself to a point where it's onerous. I don't want to feel that burden of responsibility any more. And I said to my committee that I had up here for our last meeting at Christmastime, I said "I hope you don't mind that I work in a sporadic sort of way when I feel as though I've got the energy to do it".

98.01 **VM: This is the committee on the board here?**

AS: No, no, the prisons committee.

VM: The committee of prisons.

AS: Women's Prison Committee.

VM: And being on the board here you're able to do that in the same way without it being onerous?

AS: Well, there is more pressure, really, about being on the board here because I think you have a responsibility to make sure you're making the right decisions on behalf of everyone and I'm very keen on actually making sure they have newsletters to tell people what we're up to and we're getting ready to have an information meeting about. And I wasn't in favour of asking everybody what colour the carpet should be. I think there are some things you can make decisions (snaps fingers) about. We have new light fittings in the hallway but we don't ask everybody, that sort of thing but major things that affect people in terms of their financial responsibility and stuff like that.

VM: Do you think most of the residents feel strongly about the fact that it's a heritage building, that they relate to that or is that secondary?

AS: I think some of them do very strongly but I don't know whether – see, there's a difference, I think, in attitude generally between the generations. So I think the younger people actually would see their buying into this as thinking of it as a prestige thing, of the financial value of it. And the extraordinary thing is, you see, where there wasn't a lot of turnover in places here, people had been here for years and years and years, suddenly there's people buying and selling here and some people buying as investment properties and that's a real change.

100.15 **VM:** I was thinking of how you said you looked up at the building when you came from the country and thought “I’d like to live there”.

AS: Yes, yes.

VM: So it was something about the actual building because you’d never been inside.

AS: Yes, that’s right, that’s right.

VM: That appealed to you.

AS: Yes, it did.

VM: What, the aesthetic of it or just the position?

AS: Oh, both. But I mean just the fact that it looked to me like an elegant building and what a superb position it was in and thinking of people living in apartments, not in a house. But, yes, it’s interesting. We have recently had a discussion on the board about the extent to which people should be able to buy here as an investment property. It’s very difficult.

VM: What, difficult to control?

AS: Well, it changes the character of the place. I mean, what is more desirable about a living arrangement is to be living in a community of residents in the same building, not somebody who’s actually bought it as a trophy or something as a financial measure to make money out of it so you don’t know who’s going to be – well, you will know who’s living there but it’s like a commitment to the building, really, because the history of the building is very important to me as well because of the fact that people wanted to build a community.

102.17 **VM:** It was a cooperative.

AS: Yes, a cooperative, the first cooperative in Sydney. And we want to, at the end of our façade project, we want to actually put the plaque on the front of the building which they originally wanted to put when they built it. We had discussions about this at the board because the original wording is – I should take you downstairs and the concierge will show you the original one. It said “The Astor Flats Cooperative, di, di, di, di, di, built by” all this stuff. And one of the fellows on the board said “I don’t like the word ‘flats’” and I said “Oh, it’s too working class for you, is it?” He said “I think we should have ‘apartments’” and I said “Well, that’s too American for me”. So what we’ve decided

is we just have 'The Astor'. I believe in committees and I believe in compromise.

VM: Very good.

AS: On most things. There are some things you can never compromise on.

VM: But that you could, yes. You just wanted to say that - - -

AS: Oh, I'm just so pleased to be here. I feel comfortable, I feel – well, I think the word is comfort, I'm comfortable being here, I'm comfortable in my own space and I'm comfortable being in this building and being part of the community of the building; I really appreciate that. I do like other people, I love other people and other people's stories and other people, I like - - -

Interview ends