

**NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING**

**'Millers Point Oral History Project'**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

INTERVIEWEE: **Bill Ford**  
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INTERVIEWER: Siobhán McHUGH  
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00:01 START OF TAPE MP-SM16A: SIDE A

00:03 Tape identification

*So Bill can you start maybe at the beginning of your family's connections with Millers Point?*

00:29 Okay. We can only track through my grandmother, who was a Roberts. The

reason for that my father, we found out, was adopted so we have no way of tracking his background. My grandfather is a mystery. We have had three lots of checks, one says he comes from Liverpool, one said from London and one said he was born in Buckajo, which is just outside of Bega on the south coast, so the only real tracking we have that is quite clear is through my grandmother. Now it turns out that Thomas Moroney came out on the *Governor Reddy* in 1829 from Clare County - he got a seven year sentence for sheep stealing, and Mary Cummins was also given a seven year sentence, she came out on the *Rosalind Castle* in 1836 from Tipperary and she got her trip for street robbery. They married at Camden on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1836. They somehow moved, there were a number of connections, and in 1887 Mary Grey-Stear married Evan Roberts. Stear comes from the Maroney-Cummins connection.

02:22 They lived at that stage in Harp Street, Millers Point. Harp Street doesn't exist any more - it was one of the streets that was destroyed when they reconstructed, following the supposed rat plague.

Now what we don't know was when those people were displaced where they lived until Millers Point was rebuilt, particularly Dalgety Terrace starts to be occupied in 1908, so it is a new development on Millers Point. The streets that were there were destroyed to put Hickson Road in.

*I have a map here that will make that pretty obvious for you as well.*

03:18 Here is Dalgety Road here and there is Dalgety Terrace. They started to move in, in 1908 into Dalgety Terrace and the verandas of those terraces looked out over the waterfront to the Harbour Bridge. In that house at some stages lived my grandmother and grandfather's family - two sons, Jack and Sonny. Jack lost his leg in World War I and Sonny was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland and died in 1918. There were six daughters, so at some stage a family of ten people lived in one little terrace, which all believe was 23A when they moved in. There was Kate who married a dairy farmer and lived in Buckajo, which is a small community outside of Bega on the south coast. Cissie, who married an American sailor by the name of Lockwood and went to live in San Bernardino, which was a rail town at the time in California. Aunty Edie who married Bill Mackay, who was a storeman, and they built a house at Greenwich. Bill's father apparently was an engineer. Mary, my mother, married Bill Ford who we later found out was adopted and dad, like my grandfather, was a

wharfie. They were both coal lumpers, but my grandfather was actually a coal lumper, the person who carried the coal on board; dad was a coal trimmer, a person who trimmed the coal when it went into the hull.

*That was really hard work, they carried in what?*

05:49 In sacks, and of course if you are down below it is being dumped down on you and the amount of coal dust and crap that you copped down there. Dad had been gassed in World War I, he spent 1916, 1917 and 1918 on and off the Western Front. I followed his history. He would never talk about it - apparently it was such a terrible world that they lived in for those years that he refused to ever speak about it, but when he died I went and tracked his history and there is about eight pages to his Military Records and they are all about being picked up by the ambulance train, moved to some rehabilitation place, being fixed up and then shoved back in the trenches again. There is just a constant history of this until finally he is sent home and his reward is back in the hull.

06:51 The fifth was Susie, who married a Lilamand, who was Uncle Tim. He was basically illiterate - he came from a French family that has an enormous number of connections in Millers Point and The Rocks, there are a lot of Lilamands. There is a brief history written of the Lilamands in The Rocks. It is a radio history - it is not a printed thing, but it is quite voluminous and it was done by Val Garner, so you might be able to track that. Finally there was my Aunty Margaret who married very late in life to another uncle who was a Young and he was a part of the Lilamands clan in Millers Point.

08:04 I think I mentioned earlier a large number of my aunties did time in the country working as maids or housekeepers in big estates in the bush and I guess one of the reasons for that: it must have been very difficult to have all those people in one little terrace. When they were in Sydney a lot of them worked in tobacco factories where you had large numbers of women doing difficult jobs, like leafing, grading the leaves. My mother did that.

08:51 My father as far as I can work out got to fourth grade in primary school and my mother got to sixth grade, but she went to a school called 'The Ragged School' and I never believed such a thing would exist, that you could actually call the school 'The Ragged School' until I saw photo of it. There was on The Rocks a school called

'The Ragged School' and it had a big sign up 'The Ragged School'. I mean, it was the classic middle-class kind of social service. It was quite unbelievable - you had this school called 'The Ragged School'.

*Now your mother's family what religion were they?*

09:41 Well my mother was Protestant, my father was Catholic. We have at least five generations of mixed marriages in our family, starting from Thomas Moroney - he was a Catholic and Mary Cummins from Ireland was a Protestant. So you had a mixed marriage to start off with. My grandparents were a mixed marriage and I must say I am a little unclear, I think it was my grandmother that was Protestant and my grandfather was Catholic. My mother was Protestant, my father was Catholic. I am nominally a Protestant but I wouldn't even class myself as that, my wife is a Catholic and we married in a Catholic church. My daughter is a Catholic and she married a Protestant and they were married in a Catholic church. So there are five generations of mixed marriages ( laughs).

Of course The Rocks was a real period of - not real conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants but there was an attempt by the churches to keep people within the faith. I remember very vividly once one of the Catholic priests coming to our house, 23A, you had to walk up the stairs, he came to tell my father he was living in sin and he should stop it. I remember my mother coming to door and sort of sending him scuffling down the stairs. I am not sure what happened to the priest but he never came back again.

*Do you remember with your own peer group, with your school friends, was there any sort of animosity?*

11:49 Well we went to two separate schools - the Protestants went to Fort Street and the Catholics went to St Patrick's. But within our Dalgety Street gang which we had there were Catholics and Protestants and there was no problem. Except that I remember once the gang tried to go to St Patrick's School, which had a gym, we tried to go that one night and we were not allowed in. No, within that group of people my best male friend in that would have been Dicky Grandy, he was a Catholic, so there were no problems there. But there was certainly religious rivalries that went on that went through the general society of the time. I mean the police force at the time had alternative Protestant or Catholic leadership and I remember my mother telling me

when we were thinking about a job off the waterfront she was able to recite the religious preferences of every major company, so I wasn't to apply there because their preference is for a Catholic, or a Protestant, or what. Quite often you were asked at that stage for a reference from a Minister of religion, which I couldn't get, I never had any real relationship with a church.

13:26 The logic of that is most kids growing up in Millers Point - the job opportunities were you became a wharfie, you became a storeman, you became a tugman; one of my uncles was a tugman; or if you had local political connections you could get a job in the Council, which was a much more secure system. Thinking back on the kids I grew up with on The Rocks most of them got an apprenticeship and that was because the parents, having gone through the tremendous insecurity of the 1930s wanted some sort of security and apprenticeships were seen as the most secure way. Not to escape the waterfront but to have security in life. I think the *Daily Mirror* interviewed me when I won the Fulbright Scholarship and the title was 'No hopper makes good'. They interviewed my mother and my mother said, 'All I ever wanted for him to get was an apprenticeship,' which I didn't get.

*It must have been a huge thing, we will come to that later, to have got from your background to being a Fulbright Scholar. Just going back to your dad - he was a coal lumper but by the time you were born he was unemployed.*

15:04 Yes, he had hurt himself somehow in some accident and mum and dad were unemployed as far as I can understand for the first three years of the Depression. Finally got a job as a cleaner in the new NRMA House, which was just finished in 3 Spring Street, Sydney - it doesn't exist today - it was knocked over for another building later on. He went to work there as a cleaner and we still lived at 23A. By that stage there was obviously a confidence - I was born in 1929.

*What date of birth?*

15:49 20th June 1929. Then my younger brother was born in 1935, and that is quite clearly the result of some security that they could have a second child. My sister was born in 1937. All of us went to Fort Street Primary School. However, the later years for both Margaret and Frank were at the new Fort Street Primary School - that still exists up on The Rocks now.

*Just staying with before you were born, if they were unemployed, your parents, how do you think the family survived?*

16:44 I'm not sure. I think they just got odd jobs. The waterfront was in a period of terrible casualisation at any stage, so there was never any great security. I suppose 1920 was not a period of great security. I think they survived on getting casual cleaning jobs, things like that, and that is how dad finally gets a full-time job as a cleaner.

*I've heard from other people that there were gangs of workers on the waterfront and if you joined so and so's gang you would have a preferential chance of getting a job, it was almost like an informal union.*

17:36 That was a difficult period for the unions, this was the period where Tom Nelson writes about, 'The Hungry Mile'.

*Where you walked along fronting up for a job every day.*

17:55 The northern end of 'The Hungry Mile' was here in Towns Place, just at the bottom where Towns Place joins Dalgety Road, that was the northern end of 'The Hungry Mile'. It went along Hickson Road to the southern end of 'The Hungry Mile' which was the end of Hickson Road where the other pick-up centre was. These were two waterside workers' pick-up centres. So the waterside workers had to come to either of these and you walked 'The Hungry Mile' between. One was for the overseas ships and one was for the intra- and interstate ships, so the idea of walking 'The Hungry Mile' was that walk between those two pick-up centres. It is a very vivid story about the insecurities of that period of time. My own personal lifetime interest in the implications of technological change comes from this period when an enormous of workers were displaced by the advent of oil ships, oil-burning ships rather than coal-burning ships, so you no longer needed the coal lumpers and that was very much in the 1920s.

19:20 Then there was another period in my own working life when the Colonial Sugar Refinery had employed hundreds of waterside workers to carry the sugar bags off the ships into the sugar refinery at Pymont and they built bulk carriers – that was our first notion of bulk carriers – which totally wiped out all employment for waterside workers on the CSR site. I think there were something like 400 waterside workers lost their jobs on that site.

*The other thing about 'The Hungry Mile' it seems to me while on the one hand there would be a camaraderie among men who were all in the same boat, so to speak, on the other hand there would be a competitiveness which would be unhealthy. You know, you might envy*

*the person who got the job and you didn't.*

20:12 We also went through a period, and it was very similar in California where I also studied some of these things, where they had a notion of the shape-up. The foreman would come out and you had to shape-up and a foreman would pick out who he wanted on that job. There is a famous book, *From Shape-Up to the Hiring*, where they had to do it on some kind of rotational basis to cut down that rivalry. We had a similar system in Australia and I remember as a kid seeing the wharfies lined up outside a wharf down at Walsh Bay before you had what we called the pick-up centres, not hiring halls. The pick-up centres was to put some sort of order into that and if you went into these pick-up centres they would have huge blackboards and they would have the gangs written in chalk, and so that gang had to report to that wharf to that ship to that hull, I mean they were quite specific things. It was an attempt to get away from, in many ways the favours, the bribery, the corruption that goes with the old systems of just having the foreman, or the stevedore as he was called, stand up and pick the people.

*Also I imagine that people who were punier wouldn't get picked so often.*

21:56 Well that was very much so. In Australia we called it as the 'bull' system where the stevedore stood up in front of a crowd of wharfies looking for a job and he would pick out the bulls - that is the big, tough, strong ones, and if you didn't work to the pace of the bulls then you were sacked. So it was pretty unfair.

*Somebody like your father whose health would have suffered in the war - he possibly wouldn't have been in that line-up.*

22:52 That's right, that was one of his difficulties after he'd lost his job as a coal lumper. The bull system was also a corrupt system, it was not unknown to bribe the stevedore to ensure you got the job that day. The pick-up centres were an attempt to regularise employment on the waterfront and cut out a lot of those unfairnesses.

*Just while we are on the structure of the wharves can you tell me why Hickson Road was built?*

23:33 Basically there was no proper connection between the major waterfronts of Sydney. Starting from Circular Quay, Walsh Bay and Darling Harbour. In the photograph you've got here these wharves didn't exist and Hickson Road. You came up through Argyle Cut and you went down steep streets directly onto a waterfront area where a wharf would go out from. So there was no connecting road and the

idea was to connect by Hickson Road - and Hickson was the engineer responsible - Hickson Road would connect Circular Quay with Walsh Bay with Darling Harbour and that is what it did. It then reconnects with Sussex Street further along.

24:44 If you have a look at what it did, it in fact cut off the Point itself. If you have a look at some of the original maps of Millers Point they actually show a much clearer notion of a Point. You see these are the drawings that were done to create this whole connection. You can see how there was no road around here and so you had to come down a lot of very steep areas to come into these wharves. Millers Point is actually a Point. So it was very much a fundamental reshaping. All the old wharves on Walsh Bay were knocked over and a totally new set of wharves were put in and they went from the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, there was a recreation, a restructuring, of that part of Sydney's waterfront. When I grew up there all these were finger wharves and that is where I first went to work.

*That would have had a huge impact as well. In the early days you were saying that Dalgety Terrace and those little streets were actually cut off until they put the bridges over.*

26:26 They were considered by engineers as a real engineering feat - the extension of Windmill Street really reconnected Millers Point by connecting across to Dalgety Road and allowing for a real connection there. Otherwise the Point would have been even more isolated than it was.

*Also that might account for the fact that people from Millers Point are so territorial and they don't see themselves as having much to do with Dawes Point, or The Rocks even though to the outsider they all seem very similar.*

26:06 It is quite interesting if you think about that in terms of a whole range of issues - one in terms of sport. Historically, the main sport for people in this area was first of all fishing. This is the old Metal Wharf down here.

*That's the 'Met', people used to swim off the 'Met'.*

27:33 We learned to swim off the Metal Wharf and one of the fascinating things is you dive in off the Metal Wharf here and you swim about five strokes and you turn directly back onto the steps. There were sharks in this area so you dived in with great bravado, swam your five strokes, turned at right angles. The first school swimming carnival I went to I dived in, swam and turned ninety degrees at one stage and ran slap bang into the side wall of the swimming pool and put my hand up as if I



had finished. So that is where we learnt to swim.

*That's the 'Met' just behind Towns Place.*

28:23 That's right. That is where mum and a lot of the women and men of the area went fishing and fishing was an important part of supplementing the food.

*What kind of fish did they catch?*

Tailor, mackerel.

*It wasn't very polluted because of the ships or anything?*

No. The pollution seemed to start really heavily after World War II when a lot more factories were being built along the river.

*So just keeping with the sport, you had fishing.*

28:58 We had fishing. Then we had twelve foot skiffs and they were initially housed in Towns Place here. When this became the pick-up centre they were housed around here. But the starting point was always off the Metal Wharf, out between (wharves) nine and ten, out into the Harbour and back, the finishing line was always between nine and ten. There was a little launch used to follow it and for us kids that was a big day out. I remember two of my cousins, Jacky and Ronnie Roberts, both were champions in these twelve foot skiffs. It was the twelve foot skiffs that were prominent in places like Balmain and other industrial waterfronts.

*Who funded the motor launch?*

30:00 It only cost us three pence or something like that, you had to pay to go on this little launch, it wasn't a significant amount - it might have been a penny for kids. They also sold little soft drinks and things like that. It was a little community activity.

*I know basketball was another a sport.*

30:30 Basketball and netball. Netball for the women and basketball for the men. We had no flat playing fields, so these were up on King George V Playground up on The Rocks so you had to go onto The Rocks to play as part of those playground teams.

31:02 END OF TAPE MP-SM16A, SIDE A

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31:03 START OF TAPE MP-SM16A: SIDE B

31:12 And the other one which was very important for other waterfront

communities was water polo. Balmain had a baths, Pymont had a baths until it was destroyed by the pollution from the Colonial Sugar Refinery, then Woolloomooloo had a baths. So basketball and water polo in many ways grew up as waterfront, working-class community sports.

*You used to play water polo?*

31:46 I played water polo for Pymont for many years and then I finally played for the University of Sydney and finally coached the university's team.

*How did you get over to Pymont as a youngster?*

31:59 That is in a sense a diversion because my Aunty Susie who ran the SP bookie lived in 33A Dalgety Terrace and at the back of the terraces is Rhodens Lane and the 'A' houses are up on the first floor and if you reach up from Rhodens Lane you can hand things up to the back window, but only at the top area, it was more difficult at the bottom end because of the lay of the ground. Aunty Susie ran the SP booking and one of the reasons for that was that Uncle Tim became unemployed when the Harbour Bridge was finished; he worked on the ferries that took the cars across. They lived on the other side of Milsons Point and they became behind in their rent when he became unemployed and they had to skip one night and they skipped from there across to a vacant part of the Terrace and Aunty Susie set up the SP booking there. The cockatoos were outside the Palisade Hotel, the cockatoos were the people who watched the police.

33:35 Aunty Susie made enough money out of that to buy what we called a shack down the beach at North Narrabeen, so that was an occasional place we went for holidays and I became involved in North Narrabeen Surf Club. Now the surf clubs on the north side of the harbour were quite often developed by people from harbourside swimming clubs, so Balmain Swimming Club was the backbone of Freshwater Surf Club. See there weren't a great deal of residences on those northern beaches. Somehow or other Pymont became the core of North Narrabeen Surf Club and most of the people that were involved set up permanent tents in the camping area at North Narrabeen, and then eventually we started to sleep on the floor at the surf club. There was a large group of us, basically from Pymont, because I became attached to these people - I played water polo for Pymont and I also played basketball for Pymont-Ultimo, it was the North Narrabeen connection that got me

back there.

*One thing that interests me when you said that your Aunty Susie and her husband came into that vacant place - I know it was fairly informal but wouldn't the MSB have had to approve that?*

35:17 I must say that always remains a mystery to me how that happened, but it happened one night when they literally absconded from the place in Milsons Point. My cousin Shirley said they didn't have any money to pay for the transport, so they gave the person who transported them one of her dolls, or something, and she was always upset about losing her doll. Somehow or other that happened. There were some notions of inheritance, because at 23A my grandparents lived there, my parents and the children lived there, Aunty Margaret, the youngest of the six sisters, also lived there. So when we moved out Aunty Margaret stayed there and it became her place of residence until she died. She married George Young, whose wife had died, and they both lived there until they died. We were overseas at the time so we never checked out whether we had a right to move back. Whether we would have or not I don't know. But then my Aunty Phoebe and Uncle Jack lived at 27A and Aunty Susie and Uncle Tim lived in 33A.

*So you had three houses in the street.*

Yes, three of the terraces.

*Can you walk me through the terrace, just when you walked in the front door what was it like?*

36:56 Well most of them were the same but there were some variations and the upstairs and downstairs were quite different. This is 23A - you walked in the front door and on the right-hand side was the master bedroom and attached to the master bedroom was the veranda out the front. For part of the period living there I shared that balcony with my grandmother and when my grandmother died I had it to myself, so I lived basically on the balcony. It was an open balcony which just had a calico roller blind that came down if it rained, so I lived with a total view of the waterfront and the harbour, totally open.

*What about in winter was it not cold?*

37:56 Yes it was cold. Then as you come down there was a small bedroom and as I remember it my Aunty Margaret had that. Then there was a bathroom and then it opened out into another room which, as we grew up became a lounge room for us,

but for some others it was probably another bedroom. Then there was a sort of galley way that was the kitchen, it was a sort of asphalt, bitumen-type floor and that is where you had a big boiler for washing the clothes in and then you had stoves there. Then there were two doors: there was one door going out into your back yard, where the toilet was, an outdoor toilet.

*Was there a covered walkway to get to it?*

39:07 Yes, there was just a slight cover, yes and enough room to hang the clothes out the back yard. It wasn't a big back yard - it was just enough room to hang the clothes and walk to the toilet. I don't ever remember sitting out there, or anything like that. Then the other door led in to what we had as the kitchen. Aunty Susie had that - that was her SP booking room, because that was the one where you could lean out to pick up things from Rhodens Lane.

39:42 That is where the various tradesmen came, the Rabbitoh came to sell you rabbits. That is where they get the Rabbitohs Football, he was dressed in green with all this red blood all over, that is where the club gets its name. There was the milkman came every day, Frank Hyde, the famous footballer and football commentator was our milkman. In those days it was very rigid geographical positioning for what club you belonged to - if you were on the wrong side of the street you had to go to another club, it was very, very strict. Frank played for North Sydney and I don't know how Millers Point became classified as North Sydney.  
*He has told us the story about that, so we have that one.*

40:50 Mum was very proud of Frank being the milkman. So vegetable people came down that lane and the wives lent out there and had food and milk and whatever sort of handed up. There was a lane of commerce. Down the end of the lane was the blacksmith's shop and the blacksmith made small things for use on the waterfront. Every storeman had to have a hook, a lot of wharfies, if they were working on the wool trade had to have hooks. But he also made a whole lot of things for the little boats, the little twelve foot skiffs, so there were a lot of what we would call foreign orders made in that little blacksmith's shop down the end of the lane.

*What other shops do you remember in the area?*

41:47 Well there was a shop at the end of Dalgety Terrace, just a small corner store, and that is where you could buy a penny'worth of broken biscuits. The butter came

in huge slabs and they weighed it, for however much money you could afford for butter - they weighed that bit of butter off for you. There was very little packaging as we know it today.

*In that photo of you at school you look about six or something, you are very thin and underweight and you were saying you were ill often, do you think that was to do with malnourishment?*

42:34 Possibly, yes. It was also possible that people now think that maybe I also had Ricketts, because apparently I used to fall over a fair bit and mum used to get very upset if she'd just ironed some clothes, on a Sunday if we were going to go visit someone and I would fall over, I was quite unstable. One of the awful memories is if you think about it: there are no hospitals in this kind of area - we used to have to go to the children's outpatients at Railway Square and it was a horrible place. You'd sit on these long benches, which were queues actually, and you moved along the bench and then you moved to the bench in front and then you moved along that bench until you moved to the next bench in front - you might sit there for hours. The entrance was a darkened lane off Railway Square and I have vivid memories of spending a lot of time in places like that.

*Rickets is a vitamin D deficiency and sunlight deficiency, isn't it?*

I really don't know, quite frankly.

*It doesn't sound as if you were deficient in sunlight.*

No.

*So what other sort of characters in the street or the locality can you remember, either the same age as you or older?*

44:11 Well Dicky Grandy, who I said to you did an electrical apprenticeship. I saw Dicky some years ago and he was working as a foreman for the state government mainly looking after schools and things like that. Stanley Williams did an apprenticeship in fitting and turning. Des Anderson, who also became a member of North Narrabeen Surf Club, became quite a good relay runner, I remember, and he was the one that went into the retail trade. The one I spent most of my time with was my cousin Shirley and one of the fascinating things about how you create life for yourself in these places when you haven't got any money or anything like that was that Shirley and I maybe from the age of eight or nine would on Friday night go into the city and look for sort of free entertainment. Particularly, we'd go to the quiz

shows, they had the radio quiz shows at the time, the \$64 Questions. So we'd line up and get into these shows.

*Where were they held?*

45:39 They were held at the radio stations and most of the radio stations were around Wynyard Square, so it wasn't very far to go. I remember one of our famous radio commentators, I can't think of his name now, it wasn't unusual to pick a child out of the audience and have them come up to pick out the numbers and all these are live, they are not recorded, they are straight to air, so Shirley was asked to come up and sit on the stage and pull out the numbers. It was a seat number and that person in that seat got to answer the questions: they started off at \$1, \$2, \$4, \$8, that is where you get the \$64 question. Well it was pounds, an enormous amount of money. So Shirley pulls out this number and they're live and it is the seat next to me with a lady and they said, 'Can you tell me what Point the southern pylons of the Harbour Bridge is on,' she sort of sat there and I said to her, 'Dawes Point'. At that stage Dawes Point was almost unknown in Sydney. The quiz master said, 'I'm sorry you are wrong, it is Millers Point.' I got up and started arguing, and this is live and there is this eight year old kid getting up and arguing. 'I live in Millers Point, what are you talking point, it is in Dawes Point.' I wasn't going to sit down and I was totally oblivious to any notions of the commercial use of time, or anything like that. I wouldn't let him go until they disallowed the question. He turned to Shirley and he said, 'What do you think of that?' and she said, 'That's my cousin Billy - he would know!'

47:55 Later on when I was working as a casual in the department stores working my way through university I got a job at Lowes, which was then a more up-market retail group, and I remember talking to Mr Lowe and saying that they no longer had Friday night shopping. Friday night shopping was wonderful - we'd go to town, we'd buy an ice-cream maybe and spend the night kind of looking at the windows and walking through shops and all these lights, everything was kind of nice. I said to Mr Lowe, 'Why don't you have Friday night shopping?' He said, 'You wouldn't believe what Friday night shopping used to be about. You'd have all these little kids from The Rocks and Millers Point coming down, eating their ice-creams, touching all the clothes, no one is buying anything, we don't want Friday night shopping.' He had no

idea that I was one of those kids.

49:01 So we in many ways created our own entertainment. On school holidays, for instance, up here in Merriman Street there was a huge warehouse that was knocked over to put in the wharves, and we would go up there and try and get the drivers to take us for a ride when they were delivering their stuff to somewhere else. So we'd come home with stories we'd been to the far-flung regions of the earth, like Redfern and Waterloo and all these places about three or four miles away. Of course you couldn't do that now because the law doesn't allow them to pick up little kids and take them for drives around these parts.

*It does sound like a more innocent time.*

50:00 Oh yes it was. I have no regrets growing up in Millers Point. On a Saturday afternoon when our parents were able to give us money we would all go as a group to the movies. The only one we could afford to go to was the Civic, which was an old rat house down at Haymarket, we'd get the tram. Those days you had serials at the movies, so you had to go the fifteen weeks to see Hopalong Cassidy and all these things. We'd go up on Argyle Place, that is where the tram terrace was, we'd all go up there and put our ears on the tram lines to work out where the tram was. We'd seen them do it in the Wild West, put your ear to the railway line and work out whether there was a train coming, we could work out whether the trams were coming. We would go down to the movies down at the Civic and come home. We'd often, after school, go round the wharves here looking at the ships.

*Did you have a sense of wonder about the big ships coming in from far-flung places in the world?*

51:30 I knew them all, I would sit on my balcony and I knew the flags that they would be flying. If they had a greyhound up on the mast to see whether they had broken the Tasman record on that run.

*What countries did they come from?*

51:56 Well largely round this area was the Pacific Islands. You had Burns-Philp and Dalgety's which were Papua-New Guinea, Fiji, New Zealand. This group were very much the Pacific Islands. I grew up with all sorts of wonderful dreams about one day going to all these Pacific islands and we used to think it was wonderful to watch these Islanders dive off the ships and one day we'd be able to dive that height, not the

two feet steps at the Metal Wharf.

*Were there ever any stoushes, fights or problems with drunken sailors and things like that?*

52:49 There were in hotels at night but we were very strictly corralled. I don't remember being out after about seven o'clock on any weekday night, I mean we were inside. We'd listen to *Dad and Dave* on the radio and do our homework and go to bed. I mean we didn't have the sort of freedom or the interchange that you might see today. I don't ever remember eating outside of my house, outside the terrace, until I went to work.

*You mean getting a takeaway, or going to a restaurant?*

I'd never been to a restaurant or had a takeaway.

*Did you not get pies, Sargent's Pies?*

53:44 Well we would have got those at the Royal Easter Show. That was another big event, we would go by ourselves as a group, we'd go to the show. We had a sort of disciplined group and we didn't have much money. Any money was a big treat. When dad finally got a permanent job, when he'd get paid on Friday he'd give me enough money and Shirley would get enough money and we'd share a milkshake or something like that.

*Was this as a cleaner at the NRMA? Was that not unusual for a man to do that work?*

Oh no.

*Was it like cleaning offices and stuff?*

54:42 It was cleaning offices, but it was also general cleaning of the building, I mean the open space, the public spaces, all of those things. In fact, when we finally moved there - during the war I used to help dad. You couldn't get cleaners, so mum and I were his main helpers. I remember being interviewed by the Board of NRMA and I said to them, 'I've been involved in NRMA a lot longer than anyone here,' and they kind of all looked at me, I said, 'I used to clean offices in the NRMA from the age of twelve onwards.'

*You've had quite a lot of seeing things from both sides. Also tell me the story about the CSR people not knowing anything about the swimming pool.*

55:52 Later when I was sort of lecturing the executive of CSR I said to them, 'Well I'm not sure I should talk to you people,' half-jokingly, 'you destroyed our swimming pool here by all your pollution.' They said, 'You must be mistaken, there was no



swimming pool here.' I said, 'Well, I played water polo for Pymont and I swam for Pymont Swimming Club and we had to swim in Drummoyne Pool because you destroyed our pool.' 'Oh, oh.' It had been taken out of the history books, the corporate history had forgotten, or written out that part of their history.

*Now just on the rat plague, you said the supposed rat plague - the reason given for the knocking down of many of the houses in Millers Point was that there was a rat plague in 1900.*

56:50 Personally I don't think the evidence now, when you have a look at later histories, supports that. I think there was always rats on the waterfront. There are rats here at Bronte. The first thing I met coming into this house that we are in now when I got below the house was a huge big water rat. The Council had a permanent rat person at that stage. I came back from work one day and he was talking to my wife about how nice and orderly our rats were. He had got in below and how they had lined up the things that they had collected and all of that. I said, 'Hey, I'm not interested in the sociology of rats - I want you to kill them.' I've never been so terrified when I got under there and this big rat almost brushed me aside more or less saying, 'What are you doing in my house?' So the waterfront always had rats. *But maybe not plague-carrying rats.*

57:59 Well if you have a look at the excavations up on The Rocks there is not a great deal of evidence to show that there were any more plague-carrying rats or deaths at that stage than there were in earlier times. I mean how much was it a collection of statistics? But if you have a look there was a real need for the government to resume land to create Hickson Road and connect the commerce of the three major waterfronts of the city. Sydney is an unusual waterfront in world terms. If you have a look at the great waterfronts of the world, like Rotterdam and London, they were rivers and you built out from these rivers, they were straight line rivers. This is a series of indented coves that were not connected in any way. In historic times the waterside workers who lived in Millers Point fought for the right to have first choice of jobs at Millers Point and at Walsh Bay and Darling Harbour. At Woolloomooloo they fought for first rights to have jobs, the people who lived in Woolloomooloo to have jobs in Woolloomooloo.

59:25 It wasn't easy if a ship came down the harbour for people to get across to Walsh Bay to get jobs, so there was this need to connect, to provide a road system

which allowed not just the movement but easy access to wharves. If you have a look at the end of Darling Harbour where it joins the main harbour and you had Hickson Road the wharves came out and High Street had first level connection through a bridge in the centre here across to these various finger wharves as they were known then. So there was a real commercial and civic need for a road to connect them and you couldn't do that without really knocking down an enormous amount of the old dwellings and reconfiguring the road system. So I think that was the first priority and if there was a rat plague that was the second.

60:34 I mean there had never been any great concern for the people of Millers Point by the government authorities - I think it was basically in modern day terms a slum clearance, you know, get rid of all these people. A lot of these people were taken out of here and we are not quite certain where they went in that interim period. There was a decade, really, before they started to rebuild Dalgety Terrace and all the rest of it. But they realised that they needed people that were there at the wharf to run this commerce. That is why the waterside workers, storeman and packers had preference for accommodation in all of these places.

*Then the administrators of the city and that they lived up in the bigger houses in Fort Street.*

61:40 END OF TAPE MP-SM16A, SIDE B

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00:01 START OF TAPE MP-17, SIDE A

00:02 Tape identification.

00:11 Have a look at other areas on the waterfront and find there isn't enough area for all the people you need. By the time the commerce grows to a peak in the 1950s where you have very large numbers of waterside workers you finally have to find other places. That was one of the connections with Bronte, when the Bradfield Highway was built.

00:48 The first major restructuring of The Rocks in many ways is to bring in Argyle Cut, to cut through there. The second one is at the turn of the century to get

Hickson Road through. The third one is to take literally the entire top off The Rocks to put Bradfield Highway in. Now those people were literally taken and dumped in Clovelly, and Clovelly became known as 'Poverty Point' and so enormous numbers of the old residents of Clovelly have a connection with The Rocks, they were just taken off.

*They were taken out when they were building the Bridge?*

01:30 Well the Bradfield Highway. You see you didn't need it here because there wasn't a great deal there, but you had to take the whole top off The Rocks to put Bradfield Highway, so it was the southern approach to the Bridge.

*So what year did you move out of Millers Point to Spring Street?*

1940.

*But your Aunty Margaret stayed on at the old house.*

02:03 There was a period when dad moved in as caretaker and mum wouldn't move from Millers Point.

*Why do you think that was?*

02:15 That was her community. Well, the idea of moving into the city - we lived in what would now be classed as a penthouse but in those days it was a caretaker's flat and in many ways it was a lonely existence. I continued to go to Fort Street Primary School and I continued to be part of the Millers Point community. I think that is one of differences between myself and my brother and sister, that they hadn't established themselves there and so they grew up somewhat differently. Every evening I used to take dad's dinner. From Millers Point I would walk to Spring Street with dad's dinner, every night.

*Then you moved in and when you left Fort Street Primary the boys and girls were dispersed to different schools.*

03:34 Yes. I mean Shirley went to Dover Heights, I went to Cleveland Street Intermediate, which is in Redfern. Others went to Enmore. I find it interesting - apparently the kids from The Rocks now go to Balmain - we always came south or east rather than west, I don't know when that actually changed.

04:07 One of the interesting things about being at Fort Street and indicated perhaps the economy of the time is that we had a football team and we played Plunkett Street, which was Woolloomooloo, in the Under Five Stone Seven school

championships. When we played Plunkett Street we played in the Domain and so large numbers of the unemployed would turn up for the game and it was really quite incredible, the number of coaches and everything. None of us knew much about what we were doing and we never had enough football jumpers for more than the back line of the team. I remember, I inherited a football jumper from my cousin Jack, Shirley's elder brother, and he was able to get one because of the SP booking. But I never ever wore it in a football game because I was too slow to be a back and so I had to give my jumper to someone else.

05:28 I remember we travelled to Gardiner's Road, which is out Mascot, to play one of the semi-finals and even the teacher didn't know how to get to Gardiner's Road. I mean we were totally lost, as a group of kids we'd never been to that part of the world, we got the wrong trams. We eventually got there but I'm not certain how. I can never work out how we came to play the Grand Final because we were beaten in the Final. It wasn't until many decades later I worked out that we must have been somehow the Minor Premiers and therefore had this right to go back into the Grand Final. We went to Redfern to play Redfern in the Grand Final and there were bookmakers at the gate and we are the Under Five Stone Seven kids. I remember we got thoroughly thrashed that day, I think we were a bit overawed by stepping into that sort of world. Most of us never went on as footballers because there was no playing field in our part of the world.

06:46 I remember, it is one of those memories you have, walking with one of our teachers one day, and I'm not sure whether it was to get the tram to go to one of these matches, he made the point that he'd been to university and none of us had a clue or any interest in what he was talking about. That always stuck in my mind, I mean we none of us had any notions of going to a university, that is where a lot of sort of queer people were anyway. In fact, when I was first offered a scholarship to go to university many, many years later I told them what I thought they could do with that because I wasn't going to go to one of those strange sort of places. There was no notion of coming out of that world, a notion of higher education.

*Just before we go there, I'm just curious about your uncle who lost the leg - how did he survive economically?*

07:45 He survived as a winch driver on the wharves, so he was a casual winch

driver. His son, Ronnie, used to tell me how he had to go and pick up his father's pay because it was hard enough for his father to get to the job and quite often he had to go somewhere else to get paid, so Ronnie would always go and get his pay. Yes, he was a winch driver, that is the person ran the cranes on the ships.

*They have really got the noise in Bronte today with the helicopter and the big renovations next door, this is just so some people understand the background noise on the tape.*

*So you went to school to Cleveland Street Intermediate and you were saying it was just taken for granted that everybody left school around fifteen, and you did to.*

08:42 Some people who went to Cleveland Street later went on to Sydney Boys' High, my brother did that. But there were opportunities for lots of jobs when I was fifteen, so I went and got a job.

*That would be have been when the war was coming to an end?*

09:09 It was the beginning of 1945. I got a job with the Riverson Meat Company, which was in the meat exporting area. I worked on the edge of Darling Harbour Railway Station and mainly I picked up bills of lading, or delivered bills of lading to various wharves. So I was actually perfectly trained for that job because I knew every wharf, I knew every street, so no one ever had to tell me how to get to a place. I was given tram tickets to go there but invariably jumped on the back of the trucks and went there.

*Bills of lading?*

10:14 They are for the shipping. One of the fascinating things about them, they were still done in old colonial terms. You had 'inward' and 'outward', that is, we didn't ship things to England, it was an 'inward shipping', this is the colonial centre is London. An 'outward' bill of lading was something coming out of London and an 'inward' bill of lading was inward back to England and this was the classical colonial trade. We practised the same with Papua-New Guinea and Fiji - it was the way the colonial system worked. That is why many of the colonies developed very narrow concepts of commerce, it was you supplied what the Mother Country wanted in the system.

11:26 I mean my first experience of sort of other cultures was that when we had to supply a ship with a Muslim crew with meat I would have to go to Redfern where there was an old camel driver, an Afghan camel driver lived, and he used to have to put his marking on it to show that the meat had been killed in a way satisfactory for

Muslims. I would go out to Redfern in quite often a little bit of fear, I think, and I'd knock on this door and I'd go in and here were these old retired Afghan camel drivers who were used in the Northern Territory smoking their hubbly-bubbles and it looked like something out of those old Charlie Chan movies that we used to go and see made by Hollywood with all these kind of strange people from other worlds. All he'd do is put a cross and I could have put a cross on the thing - I mean these people were totally illiterate and they'd just put a cross on it and they had no idea, that the meat was killed somewhere else.

12:50 I learnt very quickly some of the cultures of the waterfront. The first day I was sent across to the goods yard - they were unloading pigs, big porkers, to be taken off the rail trucks and delivered to either a ship or a freezer area. My job was to count them coming off and I remember saying to the first truckie, 'You've got twenty-five,' and he said, 'No, no, you can't count, kid, I've got twenty-four.' I said, 'You've got twenty-five.' He said, 'Listen kid, you'd better learn to count in this area.' One of them was a freebie which would be delivered to a friendly butcher's shop somewhere, but I didn't sort of argue.

*Did you find it a tough place to be as a young fellow?*

13:53 No. I think that my recognition as a scholar is as much to do with growing up there as it is for all that sort of formal learning I did. I learnt about a culture from bottom up, I didn't learn it as a sort of middle-class kid looking down at it. *You learnt about the interaction of function and people and what actually worked.*

14:30 I mean I came to work one day and one of the truckies said, 'I won a trucking company in a two-up game at the weekend,' and it was real - he won a company in a two-up game, so he was now the proprietor. I don't think he was literate at all and so he went into the Chief Clerk and the Chief Clerk said, 'Well you are now the proprietor,' the chief clerk was educated. I think there two or three trucks he'd won in a two-up game.

He said, 'Well now I can go and buy myself a motorbike and I can go riding at these motorbike races at the Showground.' He said, 'I need a sidecar person, so you'll come won't you?' I said, 'You are joking. I'm not going to sit in a sidecar.' He said, 'Get on the back of the bike and we'll go for a run around the waterfront.' Well, I remember at one stage he tried to go between two trucks and I had my elbows on each side of

the truck and the bike had gone. I said, 'No way.'

15:52 So you met all sorts of people, it was part of learning how the commerce of the world operates at that level. I mean the wharves were in terrible condition and you ask why and the Maritime Services Board, previously the Sydney Harbour Trust, was a politically corrupt organization; the politicians used it to appoint people to boards and all sorts of things. When I was a scholar I went down the Maritime Services Board one time to ask for the plans for the Sydney waterfront and I wanted to study it. I was given the cold shoulder so brutally, so I asked one of the ship owners why and he said, 'Oh they still haven't got up-to-date on their 1926 plans. They are not going to let someone like you have a look at them.'

*There were awful accidents where people slipped on a bit of wax or grease and fell down a hold and maybe broke their back and there was no such thing as compensation in those days.*

17:02 Well first of all wharves are a dangerous place. You worked in the rain and they would put these huge rain canvasses over, but you worked in the rain. I remember going onto one wharf - this was later in the 1960s when I was studying the wharves - where there were planks missing, it was a dreadful wharf. The wharfies refused to work on this wharf, it was one of the wharves in Darling Harbour, and the wharfies were penalised for not working there, not the Maritime Services Board for having an unsafe wharf. I said to one of the ship owners, 'Well why don't you complain about this?' He said, 'Oh the Maritime Services Board would fine me for bringing the ship down the harbour sideways.' It was an area where the camaraderie was amongst the people who lived and worked there and that was part of the survival.

*One of the things you haven't mentioned, growing up in Millers Point is politics, was that not something that people got passionate about?*

18:25 Yes. Well, first of all the waterfront was basically a very strong Communist area, but the local politics was strongly ALP, Australian Labor Party, at Millers Point very strong. If you have a look at the two memorial halls in Millers Point there is one, the Harry Jensen Hall. Do you know these two halls? They are here, at the back of St Brigid's School. There is the Harry Jensen Memorial Hall here and there is the Albert (Abraham) Mott Memorial Hall, these are the two community halls. Now Harry Jensen was a contract electrician when I worked at the oil refinery in the late 1940s

and early 1950s. He became Mayor of Randwick and became one of the most famous mayors of Sydney and of course this is part of the City of Sydney. Albie Mott was the local ALP boss in the area when I grew up and Albie always said to me, 'Bill, you will inherit my empire.' Of course I never quite did. I never, as a young kid understood the power and influence of people like Albie and I never knew what I was supposed to inherit, but somehow he designated me as someone that would eventually inherit.

*Were your parents strong Labor people?*

20:25 They were Labor people but they weren't strong. In any election I never worked in this area at all because it was no good, Labor was always going to win it. I would go out and work in a swing electorate. I remember going out and working for Doctor Evatt when he first became leader of the party in 1951 or 1952, something like that. Dad, following his experience in World War I really affected him, he never joined and didn't want to join any RSL-type organisation. All those sort of organizations, he just wanted to stay out of them, he'd had enough conflict in his life, it was very clear. One of the things I still have trouble with is talking at a dinner table. We were taught that food was hard to come by, so nobody talked at a dinner table, strictly nobody, you got whacked over the head if you weren't just eating. My mum or dad never sat down and had a meal with us, mum cooked and they ate after us, the kids were to be seen and not heard. We were never allowed to talk religion or politics in the house.

22:17 The religious one is pretty clear, with five generations of mixed marriage you can't afford to have too many violent discussions in those areas. I think dad had had conflict and I think and it was hard enough surviving without getting it on in too much other stuff.

*Just moving along from the beginning in your meat exporting job, you mentioned that you did various other jobs like Lowes, but the oil refinery - where was that?*

23:05 Well let me run through them. There was always a belief in our house that the end of the 1940s would be like the 1920s, that is you won the war but economically lost the peace, that we'd move into difficult employment times, there was no notion that the end of the war would mean prosperity. The waterside area was an area of protection for jobs, so anyone who joined up from the waterfront had a right to come back to that job, so it was pretty clear to me that waterfront jobs were going



to be scarce.

24:03 I'd done two years as a messenger boy on the waterfront and I decided it was about time I moved on, so I got a job at Australian Window Glass out at Alexandria, again as a junior in those days, which meant that I did all sorts of things. I was a pay-roll assistant - at the age of seventeen, on the days that the pay-roll would arrive in the big truck for this factory I would sit there with a whole group of other people and put the moneys into the envelope after you had all the money, right to the last penny. Then the Paymaster would walk around the factory and hand it out and I would walk with him with a gun. I had never been taught to handle a gun, I'd never been taught to fire a gun, I was never taught in any sense. I would take all the bullets out and then put the safety catch on the gun and the bullets would be in one pocket and the gun would be in the other, so there was no way in the world I was ever going to use that gun. But every Friday I would wander the factory with this gun. I was only seventeen.

25:34 The glass works was part of Australian Consolidated Industries and it was being built up by a man called 'Knock-out Smith', that is the way he did business and he built up this giant empire. But the empire became so much run by family and the tradition of the third generation finally destroying it, we've seen that happen with each of Grace Brothers, David Jones, Waltons, all of those. When I was working at Window Glass the General Manager, whose brother was the Marketing Manager, he was absolutely stark bonking hopeless and there was no chance there of any promotion if you weren't a relative. I remember talking to the foreman one day and I said, 'How did you get this job as Chief Storeman?' He said, 'Oh I married so and so.' The Chief Engineer for the entire ACI, which was the third largest business in Australia, was an incompetent fitter who'd married one of 'Knock-out's' daughters. So I decided it was about time I left the glass works after about eighteen months or so.

27:07 I got a job with W. C. Douglas which had Fountain brand tomato sauce and sweet fruit chutney. My first understanding of incompetent managers came when the boss called me in one day and said, 'I notice you are finishing that job in about half-an-hour, or an hour, every day. I employed you to do that job for eight hours. It is an eight-hour job and you've got to do that job for eight hours.' I said, 'Well I've finished it. The whole thing is absolutely finished in half-an-hour, I can do a day's work in half-

an-hour.' He said, 'Well you'd better get lost for the rest of the time, I don't want to see you.' So I used to wander the factory, learning about all sorts of things.

28:00 I suddenly realised there was not much future in that business and they were starting a new oil refinery out at Bunnerong. I forget the connection I had there but I got a job when they were just finishing the construction out there and I went into production as the sort of human kind of numbers man. They didn't have computers so I carried out every calculation on the refinery every day with a Swedish calculating machine where you pulled the handle and thousands of wheels turned, so I crunched this machine every day. At nine o'clock every morning I had to give the figures of production to the Customs man or he would shut down the refinery. Because I was a production person it meant on overtime I could work on any overtime jobs going, so I used to work on the drum-rolling line as a drum-roller, I worked as a painter painting the big tanks.

29:17 Then the boss one day said to me, 'Look I want to put you on shift work and you don't have enough basic education to be a shift worker at an oil refinery. I want you to go down to Tech and find out how to get some basic education, do the Leaving Certificate.' So I got on a tram and went down to the Tech and I had absolutely no idea how the education guidance system worked, although I have recollections of trying to get an adult apprenticeship at one stage and getting knocked back because I'd turned seventeen and in those days if you were over sixteen you couldn't get an apprenticeship.

30:05 So I went into the City Technical College on Broadway, their Vocational Guidance Unit, and sat there for an hour or something and a little fat man came back in and he said, 'You still sitting there?' I said, 'Yes. How does the bloody place work? I can't work it out. The boss sent me down here.' He'd been out having his evening drink, preparing for people like me that come in at this time every year who have got no idea. He said, 'What are you here for?' I said, 'Well the boss said to get enough education to be a shift worker. I reckon I'd like to get enough education so I don't have to be a shift worker.' He said, 'All right, we'll do some tests.' I remember getting home late for dinner and mum was worried, 'Where have you been?' I said, 'I was down at Tech. I've got to go back tomorrow night too, I've got to do some tests.'

31:11 I did these vocational tests and I came back the next week and he said, 'What

do you do?' I said, 'I work at the oil refinery, I'm a pretty good drum-roller.' He said, 'Well all your tests except one are above the level we would expect from second year university.' He said, 'Look, we've got an adult Matriculation program that was developed for CRTS,' which was the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, which was to train ex-servicemen who wanted to go on further with their education and these were currently men from the Korean War who had started to come back. He said, 'I can get you a place on that.' So I thought about it and my brother Frank, who had gone to Sydney Boys' High was doing the Leaving Certificate that year and I said, 'Well if I'm going to do the Leaving Certificate I may as well do it the year my brother does it and I can get some help.' Again, there was nothing more to it. So I said to mum, 'Okay I've a hundred pounds in the bank, I'll take it out and buy you a washing machine and that is for the rent as long as I go off on this tack.' She didn't want a washing machine because she said they didn't make the clothes clean, she was going to use the old boiler. So I bought the washing machine and went in and said to the boss, 'I'm quitting.' He said, 'You can't quit. In a few years time you'll have three or four people working on these same machines and you'll be the boss. You'll be the boss of three or four people doing all these calculations for the refinery.'

33:13 So then I had to choose subjects and I had seven months to do what effectively on some of them was the entire high school work. I had seven months to do Maths. I mean I committed some dreadful *faux pas*, I mean I didn't know the Modern History teacher, clearly he had been living with his mother all his life and was clearly gay and when he suggested I should do History I said, 'Oh that's for poofers. I'm not going to do something like that.' He said, 'Well there are a limited number of subjects you can do because it is now March and the Leaving Certificate is going to be in October/November so you can't do any side subjects because you can't do the practical work and all that sort of thing.' So he enrolled me and I needed five subjects to matriculate and he enrolled me in six, so I could drop one early if I didn't like it or something. It turned out to be a whole lot of subjects that I didn't have a clue about. I mean I did English, General Maths, Modern History, Ancient History, Geography and Economics, I had absolutely no idea what Economics was about.

34:56 I went along to the first class and what I find at this stage there is the first

wave of Asian students coming in and they have to get their local qualification. So after about a week I realised that there was one really good English teacher and they decided to split the English class into two - one Asian and one for the locals. Most of the locals were in fact people who were repeating the Higher School Certificate to get into a particular area they needed, or they were doing one or two subjects that they had failed and needed for their job or something. The CRTS was in fact starting to phase out and it became part of the general secondary education system but mainly for adults.

35:59 So the best teacher went to the Chinese, Rusty Moore was the teacher, he said, 'I'm sorry Bill this is for the Chinese.' I said, 'Rusty I've worked out that you are the best English teacher and as far as you are concerned the whole of this year I'm Chinese. I'm here.' Sometimes when people would come late from class, particularly some girls who were seen to be there for reasons that their parents needed to have them at school or something, they would come in late, they had been out somewhere and one of the teachers would say, 'Would someone get them a chair.' I'd say, 'They can get their own bloody chairs if they come late. If they come late they can go and get their chairs.' So I ran it like a shop steward.

36:56 In Maths we had a little Swiss Maths teacher and he said, 'Well because you all have done Maths, we will do first year Maths in the first week, second year Maths in the second week, third year Maths in the third week and then we will start major fourth year Maths and then go on into fifth year Maths later on. So the first three weeks will be just revision.' So he puts up a whole board of algebra and he said, 'Does anyone not understand that?' I said, 'Yes.' 'What don't you understand?' I said, 'The whole bloody lot. What are you doing, adding apples?' He looked at me and he said, 'No, it is A plus A.' I said, 'That is a letter of the alphabet.' He is saying, 'No, no, no,' but he could see he had this aggressive person, I mean I really had absolutely no idea about it, so I realised I had to do five years of Maths in seven months.

*And you did it.*

38:13 Yes, and then halfway through the year they had an internal Education Department exam for people who had failed one subject in the Leaving Certificate because they were short of primary school teachers, so they had a sort of sneak entry into Enmore Teachers' College, so they would bring a group in, in the middle of

the year just to keep the numbers up. I heard about this and I'd never sat for a public exam in my life so I thought I had better find out how to do a public exam. So I went down there and said, 'I want to do this mid-year Leaving.' He said, 'What subject do you want to do?' I said, 'I want to do these six subjects.' He said, 'No, no, no, sorry you can't do six subjects.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Well people just come down and do one or two, nobody ever does more than one or two.' I said, 'Well I've come down to do the six.' He said, 'That means you are going to be doing it on Thursday morning, Thursday afternoon, Friday morning, Friday afternoon, Monday morning, Monday afternoon.' I said, 'Yes, I need some practice.'

39:29 So I get down there and fortunately I did because you have the sort of people supervising these exams and I was asking them questions. 'What does psychology mean?' you know, and they were saying, 'You're not allowed to ask questions.' What happened was that all of a sudden I get a letter from the Education Department saying, 'You've passed all six subjects. We are offering a two-year scholarship to Enmore.' Of course the teachers at Tech said, 'You can't accept it. It is not a recognised exam, so you'll never be qualified to go to university.' I said, 'Who wants to go to university?' But by this stage I'd decided that I actually did want to be a Physical Education teacher and maybe teach in the playgrounds and things like that, I wanted to live a life out in the open. So they talked me into not taking the scholarship, which would have put me into a dead-end primary school system.

40:41 Then coming up to the Leaving Certificate I went down to the Education Department, Physical Education Unit, and said, 'I want to know what sort of result I've got to get if I'm going to get a physical education scholarship.' They said, 'You've got to do Honours.' I said, 'Well I can't do Honours. I'm an external student and it is a month to go to the exams.' I went back and I said to this History teacher, 'They want me to do Honours.' He said, 'I'll coach you between the Pass and the Honours exam.' Then I went to one of the other teachers, the Geography teacher, and he said, 'I'll coach you.' So I finally sat for eight subjects, instead of dropping one and doing five I finished up with eight. I think I got fourth in the state in the History, top ten in Economics, Second Class Honours in Geography. I only got a B in General Maths. So I went back to the oil refinery because I needed a job and the boss said, 'You got a B in General Maths,' but he gave me my summer job back.

42:23 Then they gave me a scholarship to go to university but I told them to stick it up their bott, I didn't do all this hard work just to go to university - I wanted to do Phys Ed and they wouldn't give me a Phys Ed scholarship. I was about to punch the bloke in the nose and he said, 'Look the reason we didn't you a scholarship to do Phys Ed is that you'd be bored witless with it.' So I went back to Tech and saw the little fat bloke, Bill Bentley, and he said, 'How did you do?' I told him. 'What are you going to do?' I said, 'Well they are trying to force me to go to university.' He said, 'How about giving it one year for a trial.' I said, 'All right.' The first year I played sport, I represented the university in water polo, basketball.

*This is the University of Sydney?*

43:26 Yes. At the end of the year I suddenly realised I had a good year and I'd better try and get another year out of it, so it went on like that. I guess.

43:41 END OF TAPE MP-SM17, SIDE A

43:42 START OF TAPE MP-SM17 SIDE B

*How did you cope with the absence of income though?*

Well I got a scholarship.

*But you weren't bringing anything into the family?*

43:58 I bought mum a washing machine. I'd worked out what my board was for the year and took out all my savings and bought her a washing machine. I paid my board a year in advance. Then I went back to the oil refinery and got a good summer job, I worked overtime. Then got a scholarship which helped me through that year. Then I got a scholarship to Wesley College, which is a college within the university, which gave me accommodation for the next four years. I lived on scholarships then for almost ten years. I got the Johnson Foundation Fellowship for Australia and Asia, which paid for me at the University of Illinois. I got a Fulbright Scholarship which paid my travel. Then I moved to the University of California, I got a research assistant's job, and worked my way through the university. In the summer I worked as a tour guide

in the eleven western states for Greyhound.

*You started off doing History and then what made you shift into Geography?*

45:23 Well I actually finally did History Honours but I was always going to go back in a sense to study the problems of the waterfront. So I argued for a position in industrial relations, I went to the Institute of Industrial Relations at the University of Illinois to study industrial life, which I did. Then I moved to California and did that again. While I was in the States I was also very intent on learning about the grass-roots culture, that is why I went to the University of Illinois, I'd been offered Princeton University, but I didn't want that.

*Illinois being more industrial.*

46:21 So I did a lot of field work there in factories. Started doing Industrial Sociology, Industrial Psychology, Industrial Economics and then went to California and did the same. While I was at the University of Illinois I became President of International Student Co-operative, I was basically a white person in a black house, and it allowed me to really get totally involved in the black communities.

*Just going back to the Australian waterfront, when did you come back with this incredible body of knowledge and education and start applying it back here?*

In 1962.

*Just describe that for me, what exactly did you do?*

47:15 Well that was a very difficult year for me. I'd come back to the staff of the University of New South Wales and basically that was a technical university, the library was the fifth floor of the Chemistry building. Three years of studying industrial stuff in the United States hadn't really prepared me for what had happened in the three years I'd been away from my own country and I was intent on not doing what so many scholars did, just come back and start teaching what they'd learnt in America. So I had to become deeply involved again in understanding what was going on in Australia and realising that industrial Australia now had this massive wave of migrants that had come in.

48:08 So I started doing studies at Leyland Motors, in shoe factories and things like that to understand what had happened to industrial Australia since I left and I pioneered the study of migrant labour in Australia when it was not in favour, in fact the government were outrightly against me doing it. In fact, when I applied for some

research grants I was totally blocked because they didn't want me looking at the underbelly of that. If you were studying migrants in Australia you could easily get a grant for studying why British migrants went home, you couldn't get any grants for why Italian or Greek migrant had problems with the place.

*So they were considered to be a sort of an underclass who should know their place.*

49:12 No. No there was no problem there. There was a real problem that the government could see in British migrants going home, but there were no problems with all those Italians and Greeks, they were all leading a new good life and they were now very happy. Of course that was all bullshit, I mean there were real problems in industrial Australia. In studying Leyland Motors we found that many workers couldn't tell the difference between a trade union and a credit union so when they went to leave the job they'd go to the trade union to get their money back. Or when a trade union official stood up in front of them they regarded him as someone from the credit union, he's got nothing to do with us.

*They also had political baggage that would have affected how they viewed trades unions.*

50:21 Oh an enormous amount. There was a lot of machinations within the trades union movement of getting certain groups of migrants to vote for you, so the Left and Right were both involved in organising migrant votes. If you had a strike meeting, and I would attend strike meetings, how can the work force, particularly in the construction industry, with an enormous variety of languages understand when an Australian gets up there and starts talking about the arbitration system and the judges, I mean they don't only understand the language, they don't understand any of the institutional arrangements. If you get up there and put on a migrant speaker you have absolutely no idea what he is telling them. It was very clear from a number of the strike meetings I went to, I couldn't understand the language but I could understand the response, the migrant was saying something totally different to the union leader.

*Just to try and make the connection back, it is such an interesting story that you leave, the working-class boy from Millers Point, when did you come back and come into contact with actual waterside workers and I am wondering what changes were you able to facilitate, or what sort of insights were you able to bring?*

51:43 Well when I came home one of the first things I did was to go to the Maritime Services Board and try and get plans for what was happening on the



waterfront and I was totally blocked. I said, 'Look, I'm not from the Kremlin.' So there was an attempt by the traditional bureaucratic system to block me out of coming back and studying and being involved in the waterfront. In fact there was a Royal Commission on at the time on technological change, set up by the government, and the Royal Commissioner made it known, not publicly but privately, that I would not be invited as witness because I would be more trouble than a help. He came out with a huge report which said absolutely nothing and yet there were some clear issues that had to be dealt with as you shift to bulk loading, as you shift to a whole lot of technological systems.

52:54 In America I did a lot of work on retraining, relocation of people, all these sorts of things, how does the working-class cope with change? I did that at the University of Illinois, I went out and interviewed workers. I remember saying to a worker, 'Can I have a look at your glasses?' I just looked at them they were so scratched - there could have been no way he could have been reading the stuff I was asking him to read, he was working on a lathe and they were just pitted to all hell. It was clear that any notion of a traditional interview, which I was instructed to do, was ridiculous. I'd ask him to read something and then give me an answer to it and it was very clear.

*Obviously you were informed by the practicality of your early years when you would have known this was happening. Did that give you more credibility with the workers down on the waterfront?*

54:02 Yes, but it didn't give me much credibility in the academic world. I was refused promotion a number of times because it was about time I learnt. When I came back I had a number of things I wanted to do. First and foremost, when I arrived at the University of Illinois I found that every building had been modified for handicapped students, every building in a university with over two hundred buildings. I went through this enormous guilt in saying the University of Sydney where I went for five years has no building modified for handicapped students. I had a fellow student in History who had gone through polio, like my wife, right, and I never asked him what were the problems of coping with it and this struck me day one at the University of Illinois and I see all these students in wheelchairs and everything with access to every building, elevators, everything was designed for this. So I came back and one of the first things I had to fight for was access for the handicapped.

55:31 I come back to a university, we've got our own Doctor Strangelove as Vice Chancellor, he is more interested in atomic bombs and building concrete monstrosities at the university. He starts building a library that has no handicap access. So I start following him around his public readings when he is doing public pontificating about what a wonderful university he is building and I start asking him about access for the handicapped and of course he wants to export me to anywhere he can get rid of me.

*That is something you followed through at the Opera House too, the disability access, that would have been later and they still didn't have it.*

56:12 I was chairman of the State Employment Committee and we held our first meeting in a building in Sydney that didn't have access for the handicapped unless you took the handicapped people into the basement and took them up from the basement through one set of lifts into another set of lifts and I thought this was appalling. This was a modern building in the city of Sydney and it was still being built like this. That was kind of number one.

56:42 Secondly, I became very deeply involved in the black movement in America and I went into Jackson, Mississippi with the Freedom Riders. I didn't go as an active member because I was a Fulbright scholar and I was working closely with the Congress on Racial Equality at the time and it would have been confusing and problematic for me to be identified as a Fulbright scholar. But I went in, went into the court rooms and went all through the thing without going to gaol, I learnt how to stay out of gaol. When I came home I became deeply involved in establishing Freedom Rides in Australia, and that is written up in Ann Curthoid's book. You read the first few chapters of that you will see that I'm the one that is recognised as the instigator of that sort of activity.

58:01 Thirdly, I came back with a determination to set up a trade union education program like those I'd seen run by universities all over the United States.

*Was that to educate people about trades unions?*

No, to educate the union officials. To provide basic education on economic issues. So they could take a more informed role.

58:28 Yes. There were marvellous education programs in America run by American scholars, they were recognised. At the University of California you had a Management

Education Program, you had a Labour Education Program. I was told by the head of my department that if I don't stop all these other activities where a good academic would start writing papers there is not much future. I didn't come to be an academic so I just continued on my merry way. The first lecture I gave to a class, that included my future wife, I used the university as an example of an unfeeling type of bureaucracy type of thing and she was horrified. 'You'll get sacked.' She obviously has a very different notion of tenure. But she got used to the fact that I was always going to rock the boat.

*That whole area of unfeeling bureaucracy, that sort of translated into the organisational groups that you went on to do. The relationships and how knowledge should be shared instead of hoarded.*

60:01 Well then I became interested in going back to the technological change issue and looking at what are the consequences of technological change. It means that a whole lot of people do not have the skills to participate adequately in this new world. I had seen how retraining was a totally inadequate answer because you can't just take a person off an abattoirs and retrain them to be a commercial butcher - the culture is so different, I mean I have studied both. To give you an example in America, when they were shutting down the meat packing houses in Chicago and moving them two thousand miles to the west out to Nebraska, where the cattle really were by now, they said they would have a retraining program. There was no lack of goodwill, it was a genuine retraining program but what happened: they were going to retrain these abattoir workers to be retail butchers. Well first of all retail butchery was dying in America, it is totally dead now. Three of our new relatives came out from America for my youngest daughter's wedding earlier this year and what was the most interesting thing they saw in Australia? A retail butcher's shop. These three kids who had grown up in America had never seen a butcher's shop.

*It's all in the supermarkets?*

61:44 Yes. It is all packaged, everything is packaged food. Here was a butcher who is cutting things and they were absolutely fascinated by this. So this huge program is going to train these people to go into retail butchering. First of all they are retraining them for a dying occupation. Secondly, if you are working on an abattoir line the language of the line is another culture. It is an all-male, big beefy culture, blood shooting everywhere. You can hit an animal in a certain spot and blood will shoot, so

if someone is coming through, like the manager who you don't think is a nice guy all of a sudden a shot of blood will go that way on his new suit, they all wear these white coats. The language is different and the blokes who work on the technology are focused on the technology, not on the people. So the first group of trainees go into a retail butcher's shop.

62:59 I would go to the butcher's shop with my mother and she would instruct the butcher meticulously, 'No that has got too much fat on it, you cut off that fat, you are not going to weigh that fat. I want that one over there.' She would have a dialogue with this bloke and these blokes learnt to filter that out, that is part of your apprenticeship in a retail butcher's shop. This bloke comes in and a little old lady just like my mother comes in and starts instructing this bloke and within seconds he spoke as if he was on the production line, he said things to this little old lady that she hasn't heard for many decades, swearing at her with all the language of the line. So then we moved onto the notion of recurrent education and finally we had to move on a notion of lifetime learning. But you can't have lifetime learning unless you've got learning organisations that are deeply involved because most people learn, particularly working-class people, in their job - they don't learn in institutional arrangements.

*So they should be able to have access to learning on the job.*

Yes

*I'm going to have to stop you there Bill, end of another tape.*

64:27 END OF TAPE MP-SM17 SIDE B AND END OF INTERVIEW WITH BILL FORD.