

**NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING**

**‘Millers Point Oral History Project’**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

INTERVIEWEE:	<b>Father Ron Josephs</b>
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INTERVIEWER:	Frank HEIMANS
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*Note: The opinions expressed in this oral history interview are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily represent in whole or in part the position of the Department of Housing, the Government Architect's Office, the Department of Commerce or the Oral History Consultants.*

00:00 START OF TAPE MP:FH35, SIDE A

00:01 Tape identification

*Father, how would you like me to address you?*

Ron.

*Ron in this oral history interviews we usually start with the beginning of your life, where you were born, so for people who are listening to the tape to get a bit of an idea about where you are coming from. So can you tell me what was your full name when you were christened?*

Ronald Patrick Josephs.

*When were you born?*

01:14 I was born on 28 June 1932, 46A High Street, Millers Point and I was baptised at St Patrick's Church, Church Hill on 17 July 1932.

*Tell me a little bit about your family, what kind of family was it that you were born into?*

01:37 Well my mother had lived on The Rocks area, somewhere near where the toll gates are now going onto the Harbour Bridge in a place there. Dad had lived not too far away, he came from The Rocks area too. Dad's parents, his father was from Portugal his mother from Ireland and my mother's parents, father from Norway and mother from Ireland. I was the youngest of our family, I had two brothers, Alan and Jack; Alan was born in 1921, Jack in 1925; and my sister Nell in 1928 and then I came along in 1932.

*Do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth?*

02:32 Well I was born at home, as was the custom in those days, and I know that particular day my elder brother, who was about ten and a half, mum kept home from school and he didn't know why, but round about early afternoon, it was a Tuesday, she asked him to go and get Nurse Martin and he did. Then he went out to play and when he came home he had a little baby brother, born about four o'clock in the afternoon. He knew nothing about this until it happened, as was the case in those days.

*Your mother hadn't told your brother that she was pregnant?*

03:10 No. In those days it didn't happen apparently. Apparently I had double-pneumonia very early in the piece and I had to go to a convalescent place for babies, I think it was out Vaucluse way, and it was pretty serious, but I pulled through that and all was well — seventy-three years later we are still batting on.

*Now tell me a little bit about the history of your family's occupation in Millers Point.*

03:44 My father was a wharf labourer and my elder brother when he went to work

eventually after a few jobs went to work with the Maritime Services Board, he was in the clerical section there. He was in the Army during the war, served in New Guinea. Then my brother Jack worked for a little while at David Jones and then with the Maritime Services Board also. He was in the Air Force the latter years of the war. My sister Nell worked in what was then the Transport Department in Phillip Street. Of course I did my infant schooling at St Brigid's - first of all kindergarten in High Street and then I went to St Brigid's for the infants classes and then to Marist Brothers, St Patrick's, Church Hill - I did my primary and secondary schooling there.

*Now were both parents Catholic?*

Yes. My father became a Catholic when he was about forty. He had been an Anglican, but became a Catholic round about when I was born, I think, about that time, but mum was always a staunch Catholic.

*Can you talk to me a little bit about the kind of situation at Millers Point regarding the religions of the various people, was it mostly a Catholic suburb then?*

05:03 I don't know about mostly, there were a lot of Catholics there but I don't know whether it was fifty/fifty or what, but probably more non-Catholics than Catholics. We mainly from that part of the world went to Mass at St Brigid's Church there in Kent Street, but also St Patrick's was our actual parish. Yes, I'm not sure on numbers or percentages, I suppose more non-Catholics than Catholics but there was a big Catholic community in the area in those days.

*Were people religious in those days?*

05:43 Oh yes. A lot perhaps didn't go along to Sunday worship but when the chips were down they were very Catholic-orientated, so yes, perhaps more so than now it was religious I would say.

*So were the churches pretty full on Sunday?*

Oh yes the churches were pretty full on Sunday, very much so, I would say, yes.

*Who of the priests at St Patrick's do you remember administering the mass and that kind of thing when you were young.*

06:29 Well Father Hurley, he'd been there since about 1928 and he was in his nineties when he eventually died, he was always a great man, a great preacher. Then Father Roach, a man who worked for years in the Pacific Islands in the missionary field but also at St Patrick's. Father Harry Smith, who was a chaplain during the war in

our Army and was captured by the Japanese and spent a long time in Changi. Father Lionel Marsden, who had only been ordained at the end of 1940 - he went into the Australian Army too and was a prisoner-of-war in Changi for years. Then Father Lenny Borland, Father Wally Fingleton; a brother of Jack Fingleton the test cricketer; Father John Smith, Father Tom le Strange, they were the main ones during my time of growing up there at St Patrick's.

*Which nuns do you remember?*

07:33 Oh well the Sisters of Mercy of course taught us at St Brigid's and then they had the girls' school at St Patrick's. Sister James was an identity from The Rocks area herself, I think she was born in the Hero of Waterloo Hotel actually, she was a great lady, died a few years back. Also Mother Philomena came from The Rocks, her name was Trixie Ryman and she'd been a great lady and a great Sister of Mercy throughout her life, she was in her nineties when she died. Sister Magdalena was my first teacher and I had the privilege of celebrating her golden jubilee as a sister, I was overseas when she had her Diamond Jubilee, but eventually I ministered to her just before she died and she died last year in August and I buried her from North Sydney. Sister Magdalena a great lady, she too was in her nineties. There were others, Sister Fabian, Sister Damien, that I knew. Sister Mary Nalesco of course she was in charge at St Brigid's for years and years, she was a very well-known identity in those parts going way back; she taught one of my brothers and my sister; she was there for a long time. I think she died in the 1970s eventually.

*You said your father worked on the wharves, what do you know about his work history.*

09:07 Well early on he'd been a coal lumper I think before he went to work on the wharves. When he was a lad of eighteen or nineteen the family moved up the north coast of New South Wales and had a dairy farm and his father was gored by a cow, he got caught between a wall, or bales, or something, and his lungs were pierced and he died shortly after and the family came back to Sydney. That would have been about 1911, I suppose, 1912, but dad always lived in Sydney after that, The Rocks area. Coal lumping and wharf labouring I think that is all he ever did. He was a very conscientious worker and a very hard worker all his life. He lived until he was ninety, a very healthy man.

*What was the work like coal lumping? What kind of work would they do?*

10:05 Oh it was just shovelling coal I suppose into the ships, the ships would have to replenish their supply before they moved off and sailed away, so I suppose they just did it with shovels. The wharf labouring of course in those days they had to pick up the cargo with hooks and pull it along, put things on their backs, they worked very hard there's no doubt about that.

*Was he a strong union man your father?*

10:37 Oh yes he was in unions and all, he wasn't involved in the administration of it but belonged to it, oh yes.

*Do you remember him coming home after work in the afternoons?*

Oh yes.

*Would he have his bath at home or would he have had it already on the wharves?*

At home.

*What facilities were there, did you have hot water on?*

10:59 No we didn't have hot water on in those days, we had to boil a copper and then with a dipper take the water from the copper into the bathroom, which was close by, and fill it up that way. Eventually we got a shower worked by gas it was, we had a shower there. That was very wonderful when we managed to get that in.

*What was life like for your mother, it would have been pretty tough, I imagine, in those days without all the amenities they have now? Can you describe your mother's daily life?*

11:34 Well she did the housework of course and the cooking and all. We didn't get the electric light on in the house until 1940 - we had gaslights and mantles and all. I remember if we'd been out anywhere dad would come home and light a match and then light the gas mantle. All of my brothers and my sister did their homework by gaslight, but of course when I was doing my homework we had the electric light on. I remember it being installed in 1940 quite clearly. Work was difficult for mum. The washing you had to boil up the copper and put the sheets in and then transfer them from the copper into the tubs, we didn't have a wringer and it was hand-wrung and all that sort of thing, it was very hard work in those days.

*After work would you mother get together with other women in the neighbourhood?*

12:33 Yes. There was a custom, particularly in the summer months, where the ladies after the evening meal would sit by those railings in High Street, just above Hickson Road, and just chat away there. The young people, the children, would come out and

teenagers and we'd have a lot of games like cockylorum and hide and seek and that sort of things, pick teams and have lots of games, that just happened. Every Sunday morning there was a game of cricket down in Hickson Road, and a good standard of cricket too, I might add. Every quarter-of-an-hour we'd stop to let a car go by, about every fifteen minutes or so - not many cars around in those days. Yes, that cricket match every Sunday morning nobody organised it - it just sort of happened, it was a custom. As youngsters we used to play often on the Observatory Hill, we used to call it the 'Flagstaff'. Also King George V Playground opened up in the late 1930s, so we'd often go up there for sport and playing and so on, it was an important area where we could go to play and be together.

*Who ran that King George V Playground? Was it run by the Council?*

14:01 The Council I think, yes. They had supervisors, ladies, for the girls' section. The girls and boys were sort of segregated so there was a ladies' section and a gentlemen's section, yes.

*What sort of sports would you and the girls play?*

14:21 Well there was what we called racquet-ball, the racquet was three-ply wood and we'd hit the ball against the wall, the sort of an outline of a tennis court, that was a very favoured game there. There was cricket, we played cricket and practised cricket and basketball. They would have been the main sports but then there were a lot of gymnastics, the rings and parallel bars and that sort of thing, that we utilised. The girls would be mainly basketball, I suppose, and a bit of that racquet-ball too. Softball, I suppose.

*Now tell me a little bit about what Millers Point looked like in those very early years, you said you was born in 1932, so what was High Street like in those days?*

15:12 Well opposite High Street of course you had all of those wharves that the ships came in to unload cargo and so on, we were very close to them of course. In those days often soot would come out from the funnels and if the wind was blowing the wrong way mum's washing would be soiled by the soot and she'd have to re-wash, that used to happen from time to time, we were very close to those ships. They'd be loaded from Hickson Road underneath mainly. All those buildings that were there have gone now and now you can see the water at Darling Harbour and so on - in our days you couldn't see it, it was all blocked out by the buildings.

*Which buildings were they?*

15:55 Wharf buildings that connected with the wharves.

*Do you remember any of the names of the buildings, like Dalgety's store or something like that?*

Dalgety's was a big one. McIlwraith McKechan was another one and I think Philips. But certainly Dalgety's was a very big set-up there. Dad often used to work on those wharves unloading ships, or re-loading them.

*Were they mainly wool stores, were they used for wool?*

16:28 Yes. There was a big wool store in Hickson Road near the Palisade Hotel area and also one in Merriman Street, the other side of the Palisade Hotel, there was a very big wool store there that has been pulled down since. When I was twelve we moved from High Street to Merriman Street. There'd been a big building near the wool store that went back into early Sydney history, I've seen it in sketches, and in the 1940s the Maritime Services Board pulled the inside out of it and made it into six flats. There were three storeys, so you had two flats on the ground floor, two flats on the middle, two on the top and we lived in one of the middle ones and had a wonderful view of the Harbour Bridge, Luna Park, Balmain, all that area around there. We used to get the breezes from the harbour when they'd come in, it was a very fine place to live there. Very central to Sydney's transport, whether the ferries down at Circular Quay or the trains at Wynyard or the trams that run to Millers Point, the buses, so we were very central there.

*What number Merriman Street would that have been?*

17:42 We were in 9A Merriman Street, right opposite where the Pearsons lived. They had a place that goes back to 1835 in our history. The place is still there and recently was sold I think for a \$1.5 million. Our place was pulled down in about 1973 by the Maritime Services Board and they built that big tower that goes up there now to control the shipping berths in Sydney. That is right on the spot where we lived. I am sure had it been a few years later the historical people would not have allowed them to pull that building down because, as I say, I have seen it in early sketches of Sydney going way back to the 1830s or whatever.

*You are talking about your own building?*

Yes, the place we lived in.

*Can you describe what it was like, the layout and so on?*

18:37 Well the building itself, straight up, it would be sort of Georgian-style of building. As I say three-storeys, so it was a big place. What it had been originally I'm not sure, if it had been a home it would have been a very big one, three-storeys in those days wouldn't have been the in-thing would it, two-storeys, but not three, so I'm not sure what it was built for. There had been an orchard around that part of the world - I think Merriman himself after whom the street was called had run an orchard in that area. Later on there was an eye hospital there and that was pulled down and we used to call that the 'Eye Ozzie' and we'd play cricket there and so on, the 'Eye Ozzie'.

*So it wasn't there any more when you came.*

The hospital wasn't, no.

*Do you know much about the history of the hospital?*

No, not at all.

*So what kind of atmosphere was there at Millers Point? How did the families interact with each other, how would you describe it?*

19:45 Well they communicated rather well, there was a certain spirit in the place, a clan spirit or whatever it was, tribe. I know a lot of the priests, the ministers, from St Patrick's said there was something special about Millers Point and the people and they liked it. They all liked being there, they liked what they experienced. If someone were in need others would come to their aid and help them out, offer to do ironing or washing or cooking, that type of thing. So there was a good community spirit there I would say.

*You were born around the middle of the Depression so do you remember much about that or were you too young?*

20:31 Well fortunately dad had work all the time, not getting much money of course, so we always had something to eat but there was never anything to spare. My mother was generous - when those fellows out of work would come round and ask for a cup of tea or a sandwich and she'd always look after them, she was very generous. Even if we had celebrations at school, at St Brigid's, where we took along cakes and sandwiches mum would always give me an extra lot for other people who might not have been able to bring them. When she died in 1944 at the age of forty-four our family wealth was ten pounds, we had ten pounds in the bank. So in other

words it was sort of hand to mouth, but we managed to get through, they educated all of us and looked after us and fed us but there wouldn't have been any spare money. I was aware of the Depression, like mum talking about difficulties. When the older brothers got jobs she was very pleased they were sort of in the Public Service because she felt they were secure - she had experienced what it was like for people to lose work during the Depression years.

*Your mother died at a very young age, at forty-four.*

21:53 Of heart trouble. Dad lived on until his nineties.

*Did he ever marry again?*

No.

*How did you react to this terrible catastrophe?*

Well I was only twelve when my mother died and we sort of carried on. My brothers were away in the Army and the Air Force then and my sister and I were at home with dad. Dad sort of took over things with my sister, he did the washing and some cooking, my sister learnt to cook, and we just carried on. My sister was marvellous, she was only sixteen at the time, she was working, but she did a great job in looking after us. She got married when she was twenty, in 1948, and her husband came to live with us and they just took dad and I on without any questions or discussion, we were just part of the set-up. They looked after dad until he died. In 1964 they went to live at Toongabbie, they built their own place there and they built a room for dad. So he went up there and started a vegie garden up there and often would grow beans and what have you, grow a lot and peel them and put them in the freezer so they were there for future use. He took to Toongabbie like a duck to water even though he'd lived at Millers Point all his life, it didn't bother him at all living up there. My sister and her husband were very good to me and my father, looking after him for the rest of his life.

*So what was it that attracted people to Millers Point? I mean the people that we have spoken to in our oral history interviews have all said there was something special about the place but they couldn't really define it - do you know what it was that interested you in it living there?*

23:55 Well of course a lot were just born there, as I was, and knew nothing else anyway. It wasn't as though you got too many outsiders coming in, that happened a bit, but they were mainly when I was growing up people that had always lived there,

born and bred there. Whether people from the outside came in because they had heard about the place or it was just convenient for them to live there because of their work I'm not sure.

*So who were the well-known families that lived at the Point?*

24:25 There were the Hydes, as in Frank the footballer, his family, they lived around Lower Fort Street. There were the Connaghans in Kent Street, a big family. In High Street there were the Dorans and the Donnellys, the Johnsons. You are testing my memory now. The Sykes in Kent Street, the Lucks, another family. A family called Fulchers came to live in Kent Street in the 1940s I suppose and I went to school with one of them, Cameron, they were from Tasmania. Then Cameron went back to Tasmania eventually and I caught up with him in very recent times, with himself and his wife, they live in Burnie near where I live in Tasmania. There were lots of families. The Jacksons and Leonards.

*Who were your friends in those families, which families were you friendly with or your parents friendly with?*

25:45 Well I grew up with the Connaghans and the Jacksons, Jimmy Doran, Kevin McCarthy. 'Dugsa' Davis, Kevin McBride, they were fellows that I knew fairly well. The de Montfords of course who were cousins of mine, we often played cricket together. There was a good place for practising cricket that no longer exists, it was near those wharves I was talking about in High Street, it was a very level ground and a good area for practising cricket, we played a lot of cricket there. So they were the main ones that I grew up with.

*Do you remember any significant events that happened at Millers Point during those first twenty or so years that you spent there? Particular days that stood out for you, things you might remember.*

No I can't think of anything particularly special.

*What was Christmas like at the Point?*

26:57 Great. When I was in my early teens I suppose I started to enjoy Christmas better, mixing with other families, we'd often pop around to a few of the families and have a drink with them and a piece of Christmas cake and whatever and then go home for the Christmas dinner and often had visitors there, so it was a great celebratory day, Christmas, I look back on those with fond memories. Then of course early on as children we had our presents and all the rest of it. I was very keen on

Christmas trees and Christmas decorations and coloured lights, and I still am, if anything more so now than I was then. I had a Christmas tree, it would have been about 1939 I think, had it upstairs where we used to hang out the washing in High Street and I had candles on it and of course the tree caught alight, I can remember that quite clearly. Then in Christmas 1940 my brother Jack bought a set of coloured lights, the first coloured lights we ever had, and I was delighted with them, we had them for years and years. But I'm still fascinated by Christmas decorations, I could sit and look at a Christmas tree all day - it does something to me, brings out the child in me I suppose. But I look back with fondness on those Christmases as a child, growing up, as a teenager and a young adult.

28:37 END OF TAPE MP:FH35 SIDE A.

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28:40 START OF TAPE MP:FH35 SIDE B

*Now Ron were you an altar boy at St Patrick's?*

28:48 Yes. Father Marsden, who joined the Australian Army and became a Chaplain and was a prisoner-of-war as I mentioned earlier, trained me to be an altar server. In those days of course it was in Latin, so we had to learn the Latin first. So yes I served from 1941 to about 1946. Father Len Bourne later on trained me to do extra work as an altar server, I was always grateful for that as a priest later on when I was training at the seminary. We were learning all sorts of things in *Liturgy* and to me they came very naturally because of this training Father Bourne had given me earlier on, it was very beneficial. So yes, I served Mass there at St Brigid's and St Patrick's for about five or six years.

*Did the church have a choir?*

29:47 Father Bourne started a young men's choir in about 1946 and they sang at various masses in Latin of course in those days and at Christmas carols. My voice was probably cracking at that time, so that is why he got me to be the special server at these ceremonies and he trained me very well for that. But yes, the young men's choir, they did great work there. But I was never involved in any other choir. There

was a choir at St Patrick's of older people, mainly women I think, and I was never involved in that.

*Now the schools that you attended was it St Patrick's School as well?*

Yes, the boys' Marist Brothers.

*Tell me a little bit about who the teachers were and what the discipline was like and that sort of thing.*

30:36 Well it was the old days of course, discipline a lot more severe then than it is now, but we always go on well with the Brothers. The Marists have a certain family spirit about them which is very real and we could joke with the Brothers. We knew not to go too far of course, but we got on very well with them really, they had this Marist family spirit. Taught us of course cricket and football, they were the main sports we played. Athletics once a year, a swimming carnival. But yes, I have fond memories of the school there. One of the Brothers, Brother Martin, the best teacher I ever had at school, he was very good, he took us for Maths and Religion and English, he was a very good teacher, very patient. I was never afraid to ask questions if I didn't understand something and he would explain it very patiently. I remember we were doing the rhyme of *The Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge and I was sitting on the edge of the seat just wondering what was coming next, it just fascinated me, and it is still something I like to read from time-to-time, marvellous. Anyway Brother Martin died about 1990 I suppose, he would have been in his early eighties then, and I had the privilege of burying him down at Mittagong. There had been a man, Brother Dominic, who left the school at the end of 1940 - I knew him because my mother was in the Parents and Friends Association and had a lot to do with the school in those days, so I had met him. My brothers were taught by him and he was a great man, a great personality, he built the school up very well. I'd say Brother Martin was the one I remember most of all.

*You seem to have fond memories of school.*

Oh yes.

*Were they strict, the Brothers?*

32:39 Not over-strict for those times, it was very different to what it is now. We expected it and as we grew up with it, it didn't bother us. So no they weren't over-strict I wouldn't say, no.

*So what stands out about your childhood at Millers Point? What are the strongest memories that you have about being there would you say?*

33:07 Well, living in a place where you felt secure and comfortable, where you belonged and were known by many people and talked to many people and were accepted. Where there was plenty of opportunity for sport and playing with others and so on. Just a general feeling of well-being, I suppose.

*There was some crime around Millers Point, I mean people have said that murders were committed there. What is the evidence that it was a safe, or unsafe, place there?*

33:45 Well there was a murder I remember in High Street, once a fellow was shot in a car in the 1940s it would have been, but I think it was somebody from outside the place. In Hickson Road once or twice there were murders. Sometimes there were big fights in the hotels and people were knocked about. Somehow that didn't bother us, we still felt safe there. I suppose you had the feeling, being a local you would be safe even if there were fights going on. They were often men that went to sea and from other nations and I suppose picked arguments in the hotel and often fights like that occurred. Not so much amongst the locals I would say, from memory, so that didn't bother us.

*I suppose as kids you weren't allowed in the hotels.*

No.

*So you didn't ever go in?*

34:50 No. I remember there was a Dunbarton Castle Hotel in Kent Street, opposite where the fire station is, and I remember being in there with dad as a young fellow. In those days they had pies and sausage rolls at the counter that were free, you know, I remember going there and bogging into those things and having a lemonade, or whatever. But obviously I must have been with my father, you couldn't go in by yourself. I suppose my first drink was when I was about sixteen and a half and then I'd go into some of the hotels there as I was getting a bit older.

*How often would your father go to the hotels?*

35:34 Oh every day, dad would have his beers every evening. He was a good drinker, he didn't sort of show it, but he had a great capacity, he was a regular for sure.

*Just wait for the clock.*

36:01 That's the *Angelis* from the local church. It goes three threes and then one of

nine. It is prayer that is prayed at this time. Six in the morning, midday, and six in the evening, three times a day.

*Now you became a priest, a Marist Father, when did it first occur to you to join the Order?*

36:39 When I was a teenager I thought a bit about it, being a priest or a Brother, then the idea left. I worked for about eight years after I left school in the Education Department in Bridge Street and for a while I was the cashier of the Conservatorium of Music. Then in 1952 I was transferred to Bathurst to be the Registrar of the Teachers' College there, I had about three and a half years there. I was transferred back to Sydney to be the Assistant Registrar at the Sydney Teachers' College, that was a very big set up, but I was only there for about two months when I resigned to go to the seminary. So the idea came back in 1955 I would say, about May that year, and I eventually saw a priest that I knew well and decided to resign and give it a go.

37:38 At the beginning of 1956 I went to the seminary. The first three years I had at Armidale, New South Wales, the last four years at Toongabbie and the Western Suburbs of Sydney. I was ordained in 1962 at St Patrick's, my home church, where I had been baptised and all. As a priest I was working first of all in a college we have in Tasmania, a couple of years in Burnie. Then I went to another college we have in Lismore, Woodlawn. Then in 1966 I was sent to St Patrick's, on the staff there, my home parish, worked there and also at St Brigid's during that year. Caught up with a lot of people I'd known from the past.

38:30 I went to Perth then for about seven years, a parish we have in Perth. Then to one we have in Brisbane. Then here in Hunters Hill, in Sydney. Then I did some relief work in our parishes, like I had six months at Gladstone, six months in Melbourne, six months in Perth. Then I had a year at Burnie in the parish in Tasmania. Then I went on to what we call retreat work, where people come aside for a week or a few days to reflect on their lives and pray and so on, I was on that for quite a few years. That is the work as a priest I enjoyed more than any other really.

39:12 Then in 1991 I went to work with the Marist priests in England and I had a period there. I went back in 1995, working again there for a while, giving retreats in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales. Worked in Norway for a while with the Marist priests. Came back to Australia, resumed some retreat work. Then for a few years I was Chaplain at the Retirement Village at Merrylands. Then when that was over I

came here to Hunters Hill, and I went back to England for a year, back to Hunters Hill and then to Burnie in Tasmania. I am in Sydney at the moment because I had to get some medical treatment but I have to go back to Burnie in January 2006.

*You have certainly travelled a lot.*

40:11 Yes. Many parts of Australia and even different parts of the world. I enjoyed very much working in England. I have a sense of history, I know some English history and to be in places where things happened was just fascinating for me. So close to Europe and I very much enjoyed working over there and being over there.

*Now you said you were ordained in St Patrick's in 1962 - can you remember the day you were ordained, can you describe it to me?*

40:42 7 July, a Saturday morning, there were four of us ordained together that day by Bishop Muldoon, who has since died. My family of course there and after it was over we went into St Patrick's Hall, that used to be - it is not there now - for a cup of tea and all of that. The next day, the Sunday, was my first Mass, Father Hurley preached at it. Then we went for a dinner in St Patrick's Hall, that was a great occasion and that was with friends and relatives, I remember that very well - it was a wonderful celebration. Many of those people have died since, of course, that were there then. Then we went back to the seminary for about five or six months to finish our training before we actually started our work.

*So it was a good day.*

41:35 Yes, wonderful celebration, wonderful occasion. Also, again, meeting up with these people that I'd grown up with or knew as a child there, they all came along. We had a special get-together at St Brigid's, I think on the Monday night, we had a special gathering there and presentation and so on, it was marvellous.

*You had been away from Millers Point quite a few years by that time, how did you find it when you came back, had it changed a lot?*

42:05 Not at that stage I don't think, perhaps it was changing you had more people coming in from the outside. That is something I notice now, when I go down to the part of the world to look around I always enjoy it and remember Mrs So and So lived there and somebody else lived here, it is a nostalgic trip, but now I wouldn't know many people there at all, those that I grew up with there are a few of them there, but not many, they've all moved out or died or whatever, so it is very, very different now.

*You also said in 1966 you were there for a year as a priest, tell me in detail if you can the*

*kind of problems that people were having and how you were able to help them with those problems.*

42:52 Well our main work was at St Patrick's, which was a city church for people who worked in the city or came in specially from other parishes all over Sydney, so you didn't get to know them very well, those people, there was often a different congregation day-by-day, some were regulars, but you didn't get to know them well. I didn't go down to St Brigid's all that often during that period, just now and again for Mass, or seeing some of the people. I remember we had very close friends, the Ansell family lived next door to us in High Street and the mother, Aunty Laura we called her, died that year and I looked after her. She was in Sydney Hospital, had cancer, I ministered to her and buried her when she died. Also that Cameron Fulcher that I mentioned his dad died that year and I looked after him too, from St Brigid's.

*Were there any particular problems that the Millers Point people were seeking advice about from their priests?*

44:02 Not that I'm aware of. As I say, I wasn't full-time there by any means, so not that I know of. Father John Hyde, who had come from The Rocks to Millers Point, he was the priest that mainly dealt with them at that stage, so any problems would have gone to him. I didn't really get many.

*So John Hyde would have been Frank Hyde's brother.*

Yes, indeed.

*I don't think he is alive any more, he died.*

44:36 No all the brothers have died, except Frank. Frank is the only who is still alive and he is well on into his eighties now of course. I remember Frank's daughter once going to a chemist and the chemist asked her name and she said, 'Hyde,' and he looked up and he said, 'As in Frank?' She said, 'You don't know how right you are mate.' They were a very well-known family.

*We have interviewed Frank Hyde, he's a wonderful character.*

He is indeed.

*Some amazing families at Millers Point. The Hydies were quite an outstanding family. So who else would you say was the favourite son of Millers Point if there was one?*

45:15 That's a difficult one. I don't know. I have to be careful don't I - I might say some and having forgotten others I might get into strife. The Connaghans were a

well-known family, they were a pretty large family.

*Did you marry any members of the Millers Point community as a priest?*

No.

*There were no marriages?*

I did some marriages but nobody from Millers Point, no I'm pretty sure of that.

*So did Millers Point people mainly marry other Millers Point people?*

46:07 No. It happened a bit, but I think that would be more the exception. Earlier on it would have been more the case, my own parents were from The Rocks but near enough to Millers Point. There would have a lot of marriages in those days of local people but I think as time went on, no, it was more outsiders.

*It is hard for outsiders to be accepted into the Millers Point community.*

Well I wouldn't know because I wasn't one but that could be the case, I suppose, it often is the case isn't it in places.

*So what did you enjoy most about being in Millers Point?*

46:56 Well one thing was the proximity to all of Sydney's transport and beaches, we weren't far from beaches really. We used to walk over to the Domain, the Domain Baths were a favourite in those days, swim there a lot. So we were sort of close to everything, you weren't far away. We'd walk over the Bridge to go to Luna Park. So the proximity of places we wanted to go to I suppose, was one of the big things.

*So thinking back on Millers Point and looking at the population that is there now, how different is it from your day - the people that live now in Millers Point do you think?*

Well I don't know the people who live there now, say a very few of them, so I can't really answer that. New people have come in and I don't know them.

*Have you been to Millers Point recently?*

47:58 Haven't been there for probably the best part of a year. I had a Marist friend from England staying here in August last year and I took him down for a tour of the place and showed him what was what, where I was born and all the rest of it. I don't think I've been since then. I don't know people there, so it is just a sort of nostalgic trip when I go down.

*What do you think the future is going to be for Millers Point? Do you have any ideas about it?*

48:37 No I don't, Frank, I suppose it will go on in much the same way as it is now, I

should imagine. A number of those houses in Kent Street have been refurbished haven't they, so that sort of thing will happen from time-to-time. The places in High Street now are a hundred years old, early 1900s they started to put them up, I think they are still fairly substantial. It would be a popular place to live I think for people now that work in the city, you don't have to have a car if you live there, really. Not many places to park cars. In my day I got a car in 1954; I was living in Bathurst but I'd come home for weekends and so on, you could park anywhere in the street there was no problem then but it is not like that now of course.

*A lot of new people have come in through the Department of Housing having taken over. In recent years they have brought in low-income people and that seems to be changing the composition of the place - have you seen that happen at all?*

Well I don't know anything about that now, I'm just not in touch.

*Is there anything else you want to talk about - about Millers Point?*

No I think we've covered things rather well, my memories.

*Have you been back to St Patrick's Church at all, or St Brigid's, to have a look?*

50:12 Oh yes I've had a look at St Brigid's from time-to-time. It was refurbished, as you know, just a couple of years ago as was St Patrick's. From time-to-time I pop in and have a look there because I know the priests there, they are in the same congregation that I'm in, the Marist Fathers. That's why I am a Marist, I didn't meet a priest who wasn't a Marist; or hardly met any; until I was about twenty, so I only knew Marist priests. Naturally when I thought about going in they were the ones I went to.

*It seems to me that people today are less religious than they used to be in your day when you were young, church attendances are down and all that kind of thing, does that worry you in terms of cohesion of the community and that sort of thing?*

Well, God is saying something to us in the church, as well as in the world. Things aren't the same as they were and our job is somehow to try and listen, what is He saying, what does He want us to do about all of this and we are not too sure, we are groping. But I don't get too upset, it is God's will and God's church, he's in charge, our job is to listen and respond to Him not do what we think we have to do and if it doesn't work out get all upset about it, He's the boss, so I don't get too concerned about all that. But it does concern us, the lack of what we would call good morals often and what is happening often in married life and so on, we are very concerned.

The non-attendance at churches, yes. But by and large, as I say, it is God's church and we've got to learn to listen, what is He saying, what does He want us to do, that's our job, so I don't get too upset by it all.

*Thinking back to the moral standards that people had in Millers Point how would you describe them in your day?*

52:19 I don't know. The whole set-up was different, wasn't it. I think in those days if people did the wrong thing in any area at least they admitted they were doing it and knew they were doing the wrong thing. Sometimes now people try to rationalise it all and make out there is nothing wrong with it anyway. I think in those days we were perhaps more honest, but the wrong thing happened often, of course it did, that's been human history.

*Was the confession very frequent?*

52:52 Oh yes people went a lot more to confession in those days than they do now. *So you are the custodian of all the confessions which you can't disclose, of course. What sort of problems did they have mainly, do you think?*

53:16 Well I suppose relationship problems, that is where most of us have our difficulties, relating to other people and within ourselves, with our world. It is being patient and kind and tolerant and forgiving, merciful, compassionate, these are the difficult areas, that is what life is all about.

*So when I say Millers Point to you what comes into your mind? Do you get any picture in your mind of something particular at Millers Point that happened?*

53:52 No, just a general image of the place and the streets and the people. I suppose the churches, St Patrick's and St Brigid's.

*What is the best thing that ever happened to you at Millers Point?*

Being born, I suppose. Oh these are curly questions Frank, I don't know.

*Nothing particular? You can't single anything out?*

Not really, no.

*There are a lot less priests today as well, not so many people are joining the priesthood any more, is that a problem do you think?*

54:28 Well again what is the Lord saying. One of the things He is saying is that lay people have to get more involved in the church, the ministry of the church, making sure it happens I think, so again I don't get too concerned. We need more priests, yes,

I pray about it, but we've got to take other action, you know the question of married priests and all that sort of thing and I think that will come. I don't know when, but I think it will come eventually.

*Do you see any threats to Millers Point's existence? I mean the Patricks people are leaving the wharves and there is going to be a big development there next year, that will happen, that is one of the things that is planned. Do you see any other threats that you know of?*

55:20 Well if there are any threats I think there will be a lot of opposition. Do you remember years ago the people of The Rocks got together to stop development from happening and I should imagine that sort of thing would happen again. Although a lot of the old stalwarts who were there in those days are not there now, so a lot of people wouldn't have that loyalty to the place that the oldies had, I guess. I don't know enough about it really, not living in these parts.

*Well thank you very much Father Josephs for the interview you have given us for the oral history, I am very grateful to you. The Department of Housing wants to thank you as well.*

56:13 END OF TAPE MP-FH35 SIDE B AND END OF INTERVIEW WITH FATHER RON JOSEPHS.