

**NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING**  
**“MILLERS POINT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT”**  
**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

INTERVIEWEE:	<b>Marie Shehady</b>
TAPE NUMBERS:	MP-BSC3
INTERVIEWER:	Beverley SUTTON CROSS
DATE AND PLACE:	1 November 2005 at Miller's Point NSW
DURATION OF INTERVIEW:	55 mins 35 secs
RESTRICTIONS ON USE:	NIL

*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.*

00:06 START OF TAPE MP:BSC3 SIDE A

00:10 Tape identification

00:34 *Now Marie, you weren't born in Millers Point but tell me how did you come to Millers Point in the first place?*

00:44 Well Bev my friend was already in Sydney and I was transferred with the

company I worked for and she suggested that we flat together which we did at Clovelly. Then the option came up for her to have a flat in Lower Fort Street and she asked me would I like to go with her and I decided yes, it was close to the city, I work in the city, it is better that I do, and that was our first introduction to Millers Point. We stayed together in that flat over three years, then I met my husband here at Millers Point and when we were married we went to live at Centennial Park, for about one year, living at Centennial Park. In those days the people that ran the residential were able to buy and sell their lease, so we heard through relatives of my husband, who actually own the shop and it is still there today in Lower Fort Street, there was a lease up for sale, so we decided that this would be good. We would buy this, and we'd let other people live with us and run it as a boarding house-cum-residential, which we did for thirty-one years. Actually it was very hard for us to leave it and move elsewhere.

*Tell me something about some of the people that lived in the boarding house.*

02:05 Well that was quite an experience and we had a lot of different types of people living with us but we were quite selective. I remember saying to my husband, 'I don't really want anybody in here that drinks,' and we'd only been running this place for about three weeks and one Saturday my husband came up and said, 'There's a gentleman knocking at the front door and he is interested in the attic apartment, but he's drunk.' I said, 'Oh, we can't have anybody in here that drinks,' I was a bit of a wowser as far as alcohol and still am. So I went down to tell this man that no, the flat had been let and I took one look at his face and although he was swaying in the wind I thought he had such a nice kind face that I relented, let him have a look at the flat, and he stayed with us for twenty-five years. Needless to say every Friday from then on, from the time he took the flat, he would come home drunk with a chocolate in his pocket because I'd had children in the meantime. By the time he got home from the pub and handed the chocolate over you couldn't wring it out. But he was a dear part of my memory and he will always have a place in my heart. We had a few kooks there, like one guy who used to hang his socks on the lampshade to dry. Another young guy who had obviously never used an electric oven stuck in a can of soup, lid on, and we had wall-to-wall soup. We had nurses, we had a plastic surgeon's nurse, we've had a private investigator, we had artists, we had every type of person that you could imagine and I'll never forget any of them. It was very sad after thirty-one years

that we actually moved on.

*So you came as a young married woman, bought the residential and you had several children.*

Two, two girls.

*What school did they go to?*

03:57 They started off here at St Brigid's in Kent Street. I might add to my way of thinking this was really personal tuition, because at the most there would have been eighteen children at that school, Kindergarten, First and Second, and the teacher could spend a lot of time with the children and they really progressed very, very well. As they moved out of that school they went to St Benedict's at Broadway, they did very well there. Then back to St Patrick's and over to Chatswood. So it was a round-the-world course for them to complete their education, but I must admit that I feel they got such a great start here in Kent Street. I'm sorry to say that that school, along with many other very fond memories of my time here, the places have gone. I think the school now is an architectural office, something like that, and it is a sad loss to this area.

*So you feel that a lot of the facilities have been lost.*

04:59 A lot of the facilities. A lot of the children. Well when we moved here it was more of a close-knit community. I remember when we first came here I met one of the mothers at the school and she said to me, 'Marie, you are new in the area - don't say a word about anybody to anybody else because nearly everybody here is related.' They ran this area then like if somebody had to work on the wharves then the children would get an apartment here and it would go down. If you were related to somebody who worked on the wharves you would actually be able to put your name on a list, similar to the Housing Commission, and be allocated a home. So I learnt then just don't say anything until you find out who everybody is related to. The schooling there, most of the houses had children in them, we became very friendly as a mothers' group, we organised all the old chook raffles at the Captain Cook Hotel, had school fetes. I remember that one of the big fetes that we had at the school was two shillings, now twenty cents a ticket in a television set and I think we made about four times the price of the television set. So it was a community and I think that community has gone now. This is just a place where people come home to sleep and

it has lost that charm and that closeness and everybody helping their neighbours sort of attitude.

06:20 I know when we had the residential when people were sick I would cook for them, I wanted it to be a home for them. We'd help each other out, if they couldn't pay the rent this week well we'd take it next week, or we'd take it in instalments. If they didn't have any money food we'd give them back the rent. I think we used to call it, 'St Vincent de Paulo', but great times.

*I think with your residential too you had a lot of people stay with you a long time.*

06:49 We did. One of our dear tenants actually passed away last week - she was fifty-one, she's been there thirty-one years. She actually met her husband who was also a tenant there. Unfortunately Jill has gone now, but I have very fond memories of her and that will always be Jill's flat. We have had people who have asked me to write love letters for them because they couldn't speak English. I remember we had this girl living with us and she'd been there quite a few years, eleven years I think, and she'd never had the opportunity to meet someone to form a relationship with, so she decided, of all things, to join the lonely hearts club. In those days you'd write away to a magazine and they'd put you on a list and people would write to you. Well after a few letters had been exchanged the people that she was corresponding with would come and she would come up to me and she would say, 'Marie, you like open door?' I would say, 'Yes like open door, Claudia.' So I used to have the first view of all the boyfriends that were coming for her, there was long ones, short ones, skinny ones, fat ones, there was a whole smorgasbord of guys. She finished up eventually meeting someone - Cupid shot both of them, and she's very happily married now with three or four children living in Canberra so it worked out all right for her.

*Now how old were you when you actually took the residential on?*

08:11 I would have been maybe twenty-two, twenty-three. I remember one of the ladies upstairs said to me, because we had only been married about a year, 'Oh we've been married for five years,' and I thought oh my God, five years what a long time. I might add that my husband myself have now been married for forty-three years, so five years is nothing.

*What year did you come to the Point?*

08:36 I was trying to think of that this morning, I think it was 1963 because we

were here for thirty-one years and then we have moved up to the Hills district now, but a big part of my heart still remains in Millers Point.

*What are the other things you remember about Millers Point?*

08:55 I just remember that everybody knew everybody else, it was so convenient. As my children grew up if they were going out in the city their friends would come to our place - our place was always the meeting place for everybody. They used to go out in a group because they were only like fifteen or sixteen to go to the movies and everybody would come to our place. It was just so central to everything, you wouldn't have to worry about getting home by bus, you could walk home. I don't know for how many years that people were objecting to the length of time between buses, so I hope that has improved by now.

*Well sometimes they are good, sometimes it is all right. What about your family Marie?*

09:36 I was born in Temora and my mother unfortunately passed away last year. I have family that is scattered all around the Riverina and a couple in Geelong. I have no family ties at all now with Temora, but we do go back occasionally because I have a lot of friends back there, so we drop in and see them and it is a very nice little country town. I always thought it would shrivel up and die, like a lot of country towns, but it has progressed beautifully, it is quite a busy little town.

*What did your parents do there?*

10:09 My grandmother ran a hotel for many years and my mother worked with her. My stepfather - he worked on the railways, he had a contract with the railways. Both of them are gone now of course.

*So really coming from a country town probably gave you that feeling, when you were running your residential you wanted people to have that nice family-orientated sort of experience.*

10:35 I did. I wanted people to feel that even though we were not related that this was the home base for all of us. I remember this dear old gentleman that I said came even though I opposed drinking he was a builder and he used to have I think it was six-monthly washing experiences and I've never known one man to have so many flannelette shirts. He would do his washing when he was on holidays and he would hang it all over the clothesline and over the bushes because he had so much, there was never enough clothesline space. Then he'd go up to town to be with his mates and I would run to the shop, buy two bottles of bleach, come back and take all his

washing in and re-wash it, hang it out again. I don't think he ever knew that after he had done his washing I would do it again for him.

*What about the house itself, was it a big house?*

11:27 Yes. We had four flats there. It had unfortunately only one bathroom and even today that hasn't changed any. They have got rid of the bath, they have put a shower recess in there now, which is probably more hygienic. We did have the bath with the shower above and one laundry and a small courtyard backyard there. The young lady that passed away last week had a green thumb, she had a lovely lot of plants growing there, so they will stay as a memorial to Jill.

*How did all the people in the house get along, did they get along well?*

12:04 Everybody got along famously. We'd have Christmas parties together. We were very fortunate in the fact, I don't know why, we always seemed to have the right people come. The shortest period of time with us was seventeen years and that young lady bought a house and moved to Budgewoi, I think, that is where Shirley moved to, but she was our shortest term tenant - all the rest of them were over twenty years so they were stayers. I think they enjoyed the comfort and it really was a home, we called it a home.

*So how many people all up lived in the house?*

12:38 Well we had Mr Wilson, one, two, three, four, five, six and us; there was my husband, myself and two children.

*So quite crowded really.*

12:51 Yes it was. Everybody had their own little sanctuary behind the door and I think our lounge room with the TV - we would gather there. If you didn't see anybody for a day or so I would go knock on the door to see if they were all right, see if they wanted anything or needed anything. You know I wouldn't like to think somebody was sick and we didn't know about it, so it was always TLC in the house.

*What about the social events around the area, what do you remember of those?*

13:20 Well socially with the boarders in the house and that we would have a combined Christmas party. I would do the cooking and we would all gather in our lounge room and we'd celebrate Christmas together as a family, which is what I liked to think it was. Then of course most of the functions were in the city and you'd go into the city to a restaurant or to the cinema. Or the school would organise an

outing and we'd all participate in that.

*What about the people in the house Marie, where were they from? Were they Australian or from other countries?*

14:00 No nearly all Australian. We had one girl who came from America, she stayed with us. She was only in Australia on a working visa, I think it was three or four months, and she was from Detroit. She was a very charming young lady who was mad about horses, so she went everywhere where there was a horse race, or a horse show, or a horse stud. At the end of her three months period she decided to go back by ship and believe it or not she met a young man on the ship who owned a horse stud somewhere in the country, so she didn't even get off the ship, they got married and she came back so she is still living in Australia. So she is happy with all the horses.

*Well that was meant to be. You did all the chores around the residential?*

14:50- Yes I cleaned. If you asked me now how I did it I wouldn't be able to tell you. They were serviced apartments, I had two children, I used to clean their rooms and change their sheets every week. I did all the stairways, the hallways, the bathroom, the backyard, front yard, all polishing and dusting. I might add I was very houseproud so it was really done well, it was a full-time job. Then I actually worked for a period during that time too. I had my aunt come to live with us when her husband passed away and she was a very lovely lady, she was there fifteen years and she was quite ill and bedridden, so apart from working, looking after the house and the children I used to cook and look after her and her son. I might add now, thirty-one years later I still come back every fortnight and look after her son and clean his unit.

*Marie in those days what sort of rent were the tenants paying?*

15:46 Two pound ten shillings and six we paid to the Housing Commission and three to four dollars was the rent to each person.

*That included all of the cleaning?*

15:55 That included clean sheets, cooking when they weren't well. I think we came out with about ten pound profit. But I lost that after a while because this dear gentleman that I mentioned before, that I didn't like drinking and he was a bit of a boozier, he lost his job after a period of time, so when I used to go shopping I used to ask him, 'Would you like me to get anything for you?' Mr Wilson used to give me ten

dollars, I would go grocery shopping for him and I would put in ten or fifteen dollars of my own money so that he had enough food for the week. When I used to bring the shopping back and give it to Mr Wilson he used to say, 'By God mum I don't know where you shop, but you shop better than I do.' He never, ever knew from this day to now; well he is deceased - and he might know now; that I used to put fifteen dollars every week to buy him food.

*Doesn't sound like much of a moneymaking venture to me, Marie.*

16:45 No it was a home and a blessed home, a happy home.

*I guess that is what a number of the landladies around here aimed for.*

16:58 They certainly did. They looked after their tenants like they were their own children. We were all content, everybody was happy, the children were going to the school, it was a wonderful, wonderful atmosphere. A village atmosphere, camaraderie here amongst the people. I think Mr Ferguson changed all of this, somebody changed all of this when they decided that residential were not the things to have in The Rocks. That was the saddest day ever, that we had to go through so much just to keep those. We were not only fighting for our own rights - we were fighting for the people that had lived there for years. I think this was the beginning of the end for The Rocks.

*Yes that fight went for eight or nine years.*

17:43 Oh it went on. We got letters to say we had to vacate in a week. We had to go to the High Court, we had to get magistrates. We had to contribute every week to a fighting fund. Unfortunately the leader of the fight, Mrs Ball, is no longer with us but I think if she hadn't bound everybody together and we were instructed what to do, because it would have been the blind leading the blind without a leader, the residential that are even here today would have gone.

*They must have been very stressful times.*

18:15 They were very stressful times because we had say seven people and we were given a week's notice, now what was going to happen to those people? What was going to happen to us as a family? I mean the way they made us feel was that we had no rights, it was illegal to be in a residential. But we bought those residential and our landlord at the time was the Maritime Services Board who knew that these leases were exchanged for a monetary gain and they didn't do anything about it. It was only

when it really transferred over to the Housing Commission that the trouble started.

*Well part of the problem with the Department of Housing is that they don't have a policy of sub-letting, which is what they were sort of looking at, at the time. They said, 'A sub-let is illegal, we don't do that,' but of course the Maritime Services Board, as you say, they were well aware. Indeed when I bought my residential you had to have somebody give you good character references and all of those things had to be lodged with the Maritime Services Board before you were even allowed to take...*

19:26 Yes waited for permission to be given for you to move in, for it to be approved. So it was not our fault, they were treating us as the criminals but we were doing it within the law of the Maritime Services Board.

*And in actual fact doing a very, very good community service.*

Exactly.

*Providing housing for people who really couldn't afford a lot and needed to be near the city.*

19:49 We were taking waiting members of their listings also. If people were in a residential they weren't on a waiting list for the Housing Commission, so we were doing them a favour. I don't know what it was, they were a different type of people too. They all had jobs. There were times when they were out of work, but I can't remember any of them ever in house being on benefits from the government, like the dole, I can't remember anyone being on the dole. We looked after the place. The rules those days were: inside you look after, structural we look after. Our house was always freshly painted, when new furniture was needed we bought new furniture. You know, we looked after them like they were our own property. Unfortunately I've seen on the TV that Housing Commission don't look after it like it is their own property.

*Not these days, no. What about some of your neighbours, do you remember the neighbours that were around?*

20:46 Yes I do. We have still got the same neighbours that we had when we lived here. Chris is still next door. No, I tell a lie, Sally wasn't there when we moved. There were two gentlemen that used to own it and I can't think of their names at the moment, they had a residential. One day one of the gentlemen, the shorter of the two, came screaming out, 'Marie, help, help,' and I went in and one of his tenants had overdosed on some sort of tablets. I remembered seeing in the movies that you get them up, keep them walking and put them in a cold shower, which I did. Two days later she came back next door and I don't know whether she was grateful I had

saved her life or not, but she didn't stay much longer then I think she moved in the next week or so. That was my closest near-death experience.

*What about the shops nearby?*

21:36 Well we had the fruit shop of course, Dolly and Joe Leonard. Actually one of our tenants, Patrick, married the youngest daughter Cathy. So our house provided two relationships - one with the two tenants that lived there and one of our tenants married two doors up the fruit shop's daughter. There was a fruit shop and veg shop and then Joe Wassaf owned the shop on the corner, which was like what you would call a convenience store today, a little grocery shop that sold everything. That is where you came to buy the things you had forgotten to buy at the big supermarkets, the bread and the butter and the fresh milk. Actually the grocery shop, the people that owned that - their relatives still run it, but both the fruit shop people now have passed away.

*Early on, if we go back a bit, all those shops actually serviced the whole area.*

They did.

*There weren't supermarkets as we know them.*

Edgecliff was the closest supermarket, at Edgecliff.

*Right. You needed to have a car and a lot of people here perhaps didn't have transport.*

22:51 In the days when Paul Wassaf, he has passed on now, he and his wife Teri ran that shop and they would have weekly specials and they would be out the front in a basket. A lot of the people in that area were Seniors, so they would either drop their order in or ring it in and every Friday, I can see it still today, Paul would load up the back of the van he had and he would house deliver, he would deliver. As you say not many of the older people had cars, so they had to depend on getting all their shopping done at the local store. Of course now that has changed. I can remember all of the specials, buying them there, and they would home deliver.

*Also in the area a number of the shopkeepers extended credit too, when people were down on their luck.*

23:49 They had a book and you had your name in the book and if it was off-pay-week and you wanted something they would give it to you and, as they called it, 'tick-it-up'. They would write it in the book and then when you got your pay you would go back and pay them. Yes, credit was extended. We didn't have credit cards because

there were no credit cards in those days, you had to have cash in your pocket - that was it.

*So once again even the shopkeepers were a very important part of the community.*

Yes very important.

*And they supported the people.*

24:24 I think too there would always be something extra thrown in if you looked like you didn't have much. They were aware of the fact that three or four children, one person working, there would always be a dozen eggs or another loaf of bread or something like that thrown in just as a little extra thing. It was good in the area to do things like that. I can remember when I first moved here, you might remember it too Bev, do you remember Charlie Wong? Charlie Wong was a door-to-door salesman and all his wares he carried in like a suitcase, and it would have been about twenty-four inches long, eighteen inches high, and he'd have in that a pair of slacks, a jumper, a nightgown, maybe a pair of towels, something feminine, like a petticoat or whatever. He would knock on your door and he would show you his wares and if you liked anything; I bought a couple of jumpers from him; you would tell him what size and the next week he'd come back with it wrapped in a brown paper parcel under his arm. You had credit, you would pay it off, you would give him five shillings here and ten shillings there. I often wondered whatever happened to him because I ordered some towels for the bathroom, he was going to go over to I think Hong Kong for a holiday to see his family, I don't know whether he stayed over there, passed away, or whatever, but he was for years our door-to-door salesman.

*Was he working for himself?*

26:00 For himself, that was his little business. I remember, and it must have been very profitable and you wouldn't do it today, and when you gave him some paper money, like ten shillings, he would take out of his pocket a wad of notes, like the size of a mandarin and roll it around and stick it back in his pocket. Gee, you wouldn't do that today. Everybody always bought something, I don't know whether you bought it because you wanted it or because you felt sorry for him, probably a bit of both.

*But as you say he used to allow you to pay it off.*

26:31 Do you remember him? He would come every week. I remember him fondly. How much was our bus fare in those days to go into the city, five cents?

*Would have been three pence.*

Now what is it, two dollars fifty.

*Marie did you go into any of the hotels in the area?*

26:55 No. Even though I grew up virtually in a hotel I am very anti-drinking. I remember with the little school my children went to the women of the school, the mothers in the Mothers' Club, had to take a turn every Friday night to raffle chooks in the Captain Cook Hotel and I think there were eighteen children, so there would have been maybe sixteen mothers and eventually my turn came around and try as I could to get somebody else to take my turn to sell those chook raffles nobody wanted it, so begrudgingly I went to the Captain Cook Hotel. I think we had twelve chickens to be raffled to raise money for the school - we were there from about six o'clock and I think the pubs closed at ten o'clock in those days - well I don't know how many times we raffled twelve chickens but when we left we still had twelve, because everybody would give them back and say, 'No I don't want it, raffle it again.' That was one of the funniest experiences I have ever had in my life and the best time in a pub.

28:01 END OF TAPE MP:BSC3 SIDE A

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28:01 START OF TAPE MP:BSC3 SIDE B

*Marie, tell me about family life and the families in the area and the children that you remember.*

28:22 Well as I said earlier Bev, there were eighteen children going to St Brigid's little school there. The street that we lived in, Lower Fort Street, every house, or most houses, had children living in them, there were families, like mum and dad and one or two kids, or whatever. The children would all congregate, there was a little park there and they would play in the park, and it was always exciting. Christmas time I have fond memories of my two children and the other kids who would be walking up and down the street showing each other what Santa had brought them. There would be bikes and scooters and dolls in prams and roller skates. Even on New Year's

Eve I can remember a little boy from I think it was Windmill Street, running up ringing in the New Year dressed in a long white nightie, he was Old Father Time, with a beard. It was more of a family area, as I said the people would all go to the school. The little church there at St Brigid's each Sunday would be filled with people. You'd go for a walk after dinner, you'd walk down under the Harbour Bridge, which was a favourite haunt of ours, on the hot nights because none of the houses had air-conditioning, everybody depended on one or two fans in the house. 29:39 So of an evening of a summertime when it was really, really hot you'd pick up a blanket, you'd go down with your husband and kids, sit down under the Harbour Bridge and just feel the coolness of the air. You'd meet everybody - everybody in your street would be down there, so before you knew it the kids would be playing cricket and tennis and it was just a lovely memorable time for me. You watched the children grow up and as I come back now, or I used to come back, I would see children that I had helped at the school. I used to go on a Tuesday and help with the teaching of the children. The nun at the time was doing a course at the university, so Tuesday I would go down and just take care of the children. They all grew up and you'd see them on the bus and you'd think oh gee I know that face, who is that? Then you'd see children that were in first or second class with children of their own because time just goes by so quickly that these are the kids that you used to wipe their noses for them at school.

30:40 It was just more of a family atmosphere, people had time for each other. I notice now when I come back I never see children in the street. Well the school, as I said before, is closed down. It just seems to be a childless area, I don't know anybody who has got children in our street, and I think this is part and parcel of what made the memories so dear to me of the time when my children were growing up here. With all the units and things going up now I fail to see there ever being the number of children here that there were in our day.

*So you think that the area itself, physically, has changed as well?*

31:23 Definitely. It has lost its character, it's lost its charm. Everywhere you look it looks like somebody has just dumped a lot of building blocks on a corner and called it units, called it an office block, sheets and sheets of glass. You drive down Hickson Road now and you see nothing but new buildings and restaurants and parking meters.

We didn't have this before, this was where you lived so this is where you should park. I believe they have a parking permit here for the residents of the area but for how long who knows. Eventually the people that made this area what it is they will no longer be here because it will be too expensive to live here. It will be just another place for affluent people.

*What about other things you did with your children? Did you take them swimming?*

32:13 Well there was always a bit of a furphy that the block of land at the back of Lower Fort Street was going to be a swimming pool - we heard this I think for twenty-five or thirty years and we were always waiting for them to come and at least start this swimming pool. Needless to say, there are flats there now and it never became a swimming pool. We used to go to the pool down at Broadway. Where the clock tower is now there used to be a merry-go-round, that was a Sunday treat, we'd take the children down and they'd have a ride on the merry-go-round. We'd walk over to Circular Quay and go to the fish and chip shop. You would get fish and chips wrapped up in newspaper and you'd sit in the park and eat it. I don't know whether those things can still be done today or not, or do you have to sit in a restaurant and order fish and chips on a plate, I don't know.

*What about North Sydney Pool, walking across the Harbour Bridge?*

33:06 Oh yes across the Harbour Bridge, yes I think my husband's and my initials are still on that bridge. When we were going together before we were married that was a really nice walk over one side of the bridge to Luna Park and back again. Yes walking across the bridge. My daughter who comes with me now down to The Rocks to pick me up quite often comes early and takes her son, he is in a stroller, for a push across the Harbour Bridge. So that is in the family, the walk on the bridge. I haven't done the Bridge Walk yet though, I don't think I'd like to do that.

*The Bridge Climb? I think you would enjoy it.*

I haven't done it yet.

*I think you would. What about your grandparents, do you know anything about them and where they came from?*

33:49 Not a great deal. My grandfather passed away before I was born. As I said my grandmother ran a hotel. I know they came originally from Toolamba and Gundagai and owned a lot of land up there. He just passed away, my grandfather, I really don't

know too much about him, never met him.

*A lot of families didn't always talk about their...*

34:14 We are a pretty close-knit family. Even though we are scattered everywhere the first sign of trouble we come together like I don't know what.

*When you were growing up was religion important to you?*

34:27 Religion has always been very important to me. I can remember even in Temora as a child when Lent was on for forty days I used to ride my pushbike a couple of miles to the local church. For forty days I'd be going past the butcher's shop and they'd be singing out, 'There she goes. G'day Marie.' So religion is very important, I like my religion. I don't push it on to anybody, each to his own, but it gives me a lot of comfort and inner strength.

*So when you came to live in Millers Point you attended the local church.*

34:57 Actually that is where I met my husband, the local church, because he's Catholic. We'd go to the local church of a Sunday and we just got to talking one Sunday and nearly two years later we were married and we've been married, as I said, for forty-three years, so I think it was blessed in heaven.

*With the house that you lived in, in Lower Fort Street was it in reasonable condition when you first went there?*

35:25 Yes. The people that owned it before we did took very good care of the house, it had been painted and running repairs done on the house as they needed to be done. I think the lady's husband was actually a carpenter, so she had first-hand help in the home. When we bought it from them my husband is a painter and it was always freshly painted and any major repairs were always done straight away. It took a bit of talking and that for him to get around to doing it but he did it.

*Do you remember the lay-out in the house, what the rooms were like?*

36:05 Yes I remember the rooms. You walked straight in the front door and there was a big double room there on your right and at the back of that was a sitting room and a balcony kitchen and then the bathroom. They are all on ground level.

Downstairs is a very big room, which the gentleman uses now as a bed/sitting room, and quite a nice sized kitchen and access to the backyard. It has got an outside loo and also it has got the original copper there. I can remember when I used to do all the sheets they were washed by copper, you'd light up the old fire and you would

throw the sheets in and you would boil the heck out of them. Then you had to be nearly a body-builder to lift them out and into the tub and rinse them in cold water. These kids today with the washing machines that are fully automatic are so lucky. *So you'd also wring them by hand.*

36:57 No I had a wringer, one of these things that you sit on the side of the tub and you turn the handle around. Getting back to the lay-out of the house, then you went up the stairs and there was another smaller size room which was a bedroom with an off-balcony, enclosed balcony. Then quite a big room which was used as a lounge/ sitting room and then a kitchen on the veranda. That is where we lived, we lived up on the first floor. I can't remember how many meals I cooked in that little kitchen and how many people that were going from one hotel to the other would say, 'Oh something smells nice.' I was spotted there one day when I was doing some cooking and one of these young fellows who had had too much to drink I remember him standing at the window and singing out, 'Let down your hair.' What was the name of that nursery-rhyme?

*Rapunzel*

37:49 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair.' I remember another evening - this is in my memory of funny things that happened in the house. I got up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water and I walked through and heard this commotion. I walked out into the balcony kitchen and I looked down and I saw this inebriated gentleman, I will call him that, trying to hop over our front fence. So as he lifted up one leg to hop over the fence I (coughed loudly) and the leg would go back. Then he'd wait a little while and then he used to try to climb over the fence again and again I coughed loudly and I think he gave up then. He started to go up to the top of the street, like it is a bit hilly, and the last thing I saw him do was virtually running down the hill - I don't think he could stop. And pot plants, I don't know how many pot plants I lost off my front veranda. I got up one morning to go to work and I walked out the front and I thought oh my goodness what is different here and I looked and somebody had taken every pot plant off the front veranda - three, and three on the windowsill. How they carried them away I have no idea. That was one thing I hated.

*Did you replace them?*

39:01 Oh eventually. I always replaced them after a while of thinking I'm not going to put any more back there. The new people who are in the house they don't have any pots, so they are wise, but I like a bit of greenery. They have got a nice garden down the back, but nothing up the front.

*Now with the neighbours - can you remember what did they do for a living, where did they work?*

39:28 Well I remember one of the neighbours -her husband drove a meat truck and they had two children. I remember the children as being beautifully-behaved children, always dressed to perfection. One of them now I believe is CEO of a big company and the other one runs a bookshop. The neighbour next door, the people that were there when we first moved in, the two gentlemen, I think they were in the building game. The young lady there now, she is very intelligent but I think she is just a homebody, I'm not too sure. Her daughter is a vet and she is overseas at the moment. They are a lovely family. I was actually there when the little one was born, went in to have a look at the little baby, and not so long ago I helped her mum with the twenty-first birthday party, so the time has gone very quickly.

*You have still maintained the connections.*

40:24 I have still maintained the friendship with them. When I come back here it is as if I have never been away, we talk and they come in and say hello and that. That is one good thing with the house, the people on either side, Sally has been there for twenty-one years, twenty-three her daughter is now, and Christine has been over there longer than what we were. We were there I think thirty-one years, so she must have been there over forty years, even more than that. She is part of the furniture around the place. Always had lovely dogs. I always said if anything happened to me I'm coming back as an animal and I'll come back as Chris's dog. Very spoiled. Or even to Sally for that matter.

*So you don't remember the trams to Millers Point?*

41:11 No I don't. At the time of the trams I wasn't married then. I tell a lie, yes I was, I was at Centennial Park. I think when we first moved here to the Point trams had been done away with within this area because the tram line still remained in Lower Fort Street. No, we used to go by bus, I don't remember the trams.

*What about the increase in traffic through the area?*

41:36 Well now particularly, although they've got the speed limit down now, there is a lot more parking in the area now, especially down Hickson Road. Not living here I don't know how much the traffic has increased because most people come and leave their car now very early in the morning, so the spaces are taken up by six o'clock, so unless you are out and about then you don't see it.

*Over the time that you did live here did you notice a difference from when you first came?*

42:10 Yes. There are more cars on the road now and a lot of deliveries are made, people have been buying things and they are being delivered by truck.

Representatives going through the area. Now also we've got down here one of the berths for the travel ships, the vessels.

*To Tasmania.*

So that would bring a bit more traffic into the area too.

*Do you think that has had an adverse affect on the area in terms of how you enjoy the peace and quiet, or the village atmosphere that it used to be, do you think that has changed it?*

42:45 I think it has, but that is progress you can't stop that. There is more traffic going through the area for the shipping and that and this of course is where everybody wants to The Rocks. I don't know how many pubs there are, but the Pub Walk from Port Jackson right around here, but there would be over a dozen. Young people seem to think this is the thing to do at the weekend, they seem to stagger from one pub to the other, so that is around. There is a little bit of noise on the weekends, it used to be like that when we lived here. Really they just made a noise when they were walking past, you never here them fighting, or I never heard them fighting, or anything like that.

*So you weren't particularly disturbed by that when you were in Lower Fort Street?*

43:29 No, not when we lived here. I don't know what it is like now because we have been where we are now eleven years, so I don't know whether it is worse now or not. Of course the pub hours are longer now, they don't close until quite late. Even when we were living here I think the only noise was when people were leaving, cars were starting up and things like that. We've got the Wharf Theatre so that has brought a few more people into the area too.

*But they don't stagger from pub to pub.*

No of course not, no hardly.

*Now Marie what was your first job when you came to the city and came to live in Millers Point?*

44:07 Well the reason I came to the city from the country was - I used to work for Coles in Temora, a small store, and the auditors when they came around were quite anxious to have me to come down and work in one of their bigger stores in the city. They thought the standard of my work was very high and I would be financially rewarded, it would be an opportunity for me to advance my career by coming to the city. After a lot hesitation, because I'm pretty much a homebody, my mum said, 'Look there's not much opportunity here for you. You can go and have a try but you can always come back if you don't like it.' I can remember in those days I came down to Sydney and they put me up, paid my accommodation, in an hotel, the Strand Hotel, for one week until I found accommodation. I was put straight into the merchandising office as second-in-charge,

45:06 I paid all the accounts and entered all the purchases, debit and loss, and everything for them. Then I was moved to officer-in-charge in the cash office, which I absolutely loved, I loved that job it was just so rewarding. I used to do all the wages, all the tax, and everything was done in those days not on a computer but manually, or on a comptometer and you'd get such a thrill out of balancing up for the month. I mean when I went to my other position, which I will touch on later, it was on-line and you never got the thrill of achieving what you could by yourself on an old comptometer or an adding machine, it was push a button and get an answer and that didn't really satisfy me as much as it did when I worked for Coles.

*How many years did you work for Coles?*

45:54 I stayed with Coles for ten years, that was from the time I left school and went there, nearly ten years. Then I met my husband and we were slowly starving to death because being in charge of the cash office I would have to be in there when they opened the vault, so there was someone in the office, count all the register bags back into the vault when they finished trading for the day. I might add in those days there were a hundred and fourteen staff, a hundred and fourteen cash registers, and you won't find that in any store today. I remember, I can't think of the name of the people now, the Arbitration for Employment, something like that, they would come

and they would measure the counter space, how many feet you had in counter space, for selling products and they would allocate how many staff had to be on that space. Now I think you find one staff at the front door, one at the back, that's about it. As I say I had to get shopping time and I had just become married and I thought well, I don't want my marriage to suffer just through employment, better if I resign, even today that was the saddest thing I had to do.

47:06 After I left there I went to work for about a year for an American importing company, Alfred Stashell, I'll never, ever forget the name, they used to import farm machinery, John Deere tractors et cetera. They were imported in American dollars and I would have to convert it into Australian currency. Then I became pregnant with my daughter, who is now forty-one, believe it or not, and then I left and I stayed at home until the children started school, the second one started school. Then I got a job with the Maritime Services Board. I would start at nine-thirty and I would finish at three because the children started school at nine, so I would walk them to school, and then they would finish at three-thirty and I'd be home at three and they never, ever came home to a house when mum wasn't there. As they became older I extended the working hours. I was only going to work for a couple of years, but I lasted with the Maritime Services Board for twenty years and I really enjoyed it. I was in the Statistic Department and we used to do all the importing and exporting and convert it into a code which would be keyed into the computer and it would be monthly tallied and sent to Canberra. It was very interesting, although I must admit shipping is not the most interesting job you could possibly find, but the Maritime Services Board were very good employers.

48:37 I remember when I first started the women weren't paid as much as the men and then the unions came in and they decided equal pay for equal work, but before the female members of the staff could be paid male wages we had to sit for an exam. I remember one of my friends after the exam was over, I found it quite easy, but my friend said to me when I asked her how did she find it, she said, 'Like filling in Lotto, tick, tick, tick.' Needless to say she didn't pass, but she still got the male rate of pay. They were really good employers and I loved working for them. They were very fair to me and I was always treated very fair. As I said, they were good employers and also they were very good landlords, so I've got nothing against the Maritime Services

Board. But when we left the area I decided that I didn't want to commute every day to the city and I was getting on in years, so I decided just to retire. But I am busier now than ever and I'm not earning one cent.

*You had two girls, what did they go on to do?*

49:40 Well I'm very proud of my two girls. Janine, the oldest girl, when she finished school at St Pius at Chatswood she got her HSC and we wanted her to do Medicine but she said she wanted something where she didn't have to give a hundred per cent of her time, so she chose orthoptics. She is still working as an orthoptist, she works two days a week - one day at Dee Why and one over near Hornsby. She is a very smart girl, she has also got her own company now, she writes poetry. I didn't say that we have Irish blood in our family and we are pretty good as limerick writers, so she has a company called Witty Ditty and she does speeches for funerals, barmitzvahs, weddings, engagements, everything. One Jewish gentleman has used her services three or four times for different members of the family and she said she knows more about his family than he does. She has got two boys now, one twelve, one nine. The other little one she wasn't really a student, she wanted to leave school when she did her School Certificate. I said she could leave school but on the provision that she go and do business college for one year, so she did that. She worked as a paralegal secretary in the city for years. She is married with one little boy and just built a beautiful big home and she has gone back to work two days a week on a computer, she does conveyancing, that is her speciality. But they are great kids and we are very proud of them and they are great mothers too.

*Marie how much of your life has been influenced by living at Millers Point?*

51:21 Well looking back I feel that my life and my caring for other people really started the day that we bought our residential and moved in. I had been a little bit selfish because only having to only look after myself and being spoilt as a young adult living at home and marrying a husband who was continuing to spoil me, so just short of being selfish I think I would have been before we moved in. But when I moved into Millers Point we had such a different variety of people and I always seemed to find that every person has a good spot and I felt very close and very attached. Almost heartbroken when anybody decided to move on, especially in the early days when it was more like floating people who would come in and stay one, two, three, four

months and then they would move out. After about, say, the first five years we got long-term tenants and they are part of my family. The one that we lost last week it is like losing a sister, thirty-one years we've known each other and I feel like I've lost my sister. I think living in there has led me to care for other people and to listen to other people.

*So you think you are a different person from having lived at Millers Point.*

52:40 I think I am a much different person. I think these are the sort of places that should still be around, I don't know if there are many but they contribute a lot to this society we live in.

*So what is your view now of Millers Point?*

52:54 Well coming back, as I said I come back here each fortnight, I think Millers Point, or The Rocks, is gradually being sucked into this great vacuum of tenement housing, blocks of units, office blocks - it is losing its character, it is losing its charm. We are going to be eventually non-existent, that is what I see in the future. I don't see them leaving this area alone because land here is just so valuable and the government seems to be determined to empty out the food cupboard. Hopefully some of it will still remain, but it has lost all its character. Especially around the water, when you go into Hickson Road and you are looking down here, Windmill Street, everywhere you look, they have stuck another ugly construction on a corner and I don't like it. So I'm happy to remember The Rocks and all Millers Point as it was when we first moved in, that will be The Rocks that I remember.

*So you don't see the future for Millers Point improving?*

53:59 No. I think they will always find some excuse why this house shouldn't be there, why this should go, or let people in who want to do things to change the format of the housing that is here, that is left, a lot of it has gone. There is a lot of places now, especially in Lower Fort Street, the flats across the road, they are not going to leave those there, they will be gone, that will be the next thing. The wharves have gone, there are going to be building along there. You come into a unit one week and you look out at your window and you see the ocean, you come in three months later and there is another building and you look in a window, so I don't think there is any planning gone ahead for that.

*So have you got any final comments or anything that you would like to say?*

54:41 I would like to say that people who are moving into The Rocks now are not as lucky as the people that moved and lived in The Rocks when we first moved in here. That atmosphere and that charm and the children - where have they all gone? Hopefully when my grandchildren grow up and their children grow up it will still be a place that is existing with the history of the city and there will still be something left here for them to see. So that is what I am hoping, but with the way things are going now unless they put the brakes on unfortunately this will all be swept away. Thank you.

*Well thank you Marie for all of that, your insight and all of your memories of Millers Point.*

They are good memories.

*That's good.*

55:35 END OF TAPE MP:BSC3 SIDE B AND END OF INTERVIEW WITH MARIE SHEHADY