

**CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**OUR CITY**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**Name:** Jim Piotrowski (JP)

**Date:** 21 June 2023

**Place:** Jim's home in Erskineville

**Interviewer:** Sue Andersen (SA)

SA: This is Sue Andersen interviewing Jim Piotrowski in Jim's home in Erskineville on the 21st of June, 2023 for the City of Sydney's Oral History Collection. We are talking to Jim today about his very involved, or very extensive, years involvement in the Green Ban parks in Erskineville. So thank you so much, Jim, for doing the interview today.

JP: Thank you.

SA: Can we start by you saying your full name and the year that you were born in?

00:40 JP: Yeah. James Piotrowski, August, 1960.

SA: Great, and Jim, how long have you been in Erskineville?

JP: My partner and I, [UNCLEAR] Brown bought this house in October, 1990. So since then we bought it for \$115,000. So there you go, it's gone up a lot.

SA: Yeah, just a little.

JP: Yeah, and we've lived here ever since.

SA: Sorry, just say the date again, 19...

JP: October, 1990.

SA: 1990, okay. So I can't remember whether I said that we were doing the interview in your house where you've been living, but this is where the interview's being conducted. So tell me about why Erskineville, what happened so that you moved here?

01:33 JP: Okay. My partner came from the Northern Beaches, her family was all around there and we were living in Manly. I was brought up in North Ryde, northwest Sydney, and we couldn't afford to live on the Northern Beaches and we both worked in the community sector. I worked at in Marrickville and Tan (sounds like) was working at Redfern. So we looked to the inner west for somewhere affordable to buy, and at that

time Erskineville was a place where two community workers could afford to buy a house, which I don't think they can now.

SA: No, definitely not.

JP: Yeah. So that's why we moved here.

SA: So how did you find the suburb? What was it like when you first moved in here?

02:25 JP: It's like a suburb in transition. I always remember Terry Murphy was a famous kind of local Labor councillor here, an old AWU guy. He always used to refer to the people you see down the train station in the morning, and then eventually I worked out that they're the people who were going to work in the city, he sees them as separate from us. Actually, I've got a great story about Vic Smith, which is probably outrageous, but we were living over in Manly and there was this elderly couple who lived next door to us, and they moved into some sort of retirement village up in Harbord just before we left. So we went up there for tea, morning tea, and had a tea and bickies with them before we lived in Erskineville, and they said, "We want to introduce you to some friends, they've got a connection with Erskineville, they used to live in Erskineville."

03:24 So we meet Mr. And Mrs. Smith who ended up being Vic Smith's parents and they're saying, "That's fantastic. We always lived in John Street, just around the corner, you'll love it there. Look, I'll tell you what, you need much work done in your yard? We'll get Vic, get some people sent over, we'll do some paving in your backyard," and we're saying, "No, we're fine," sort of thing, but there was... I don't mean to define Vic Smith's family, and I'm sure Vic would never do anything like that, though his parents thought it might be possible. I think it was a time when South Sydney Council was very much closer to the community, we were part of it and people knew each other and the council meetings were just down the road.

SA: In Erskineville Town Hall?

04:16 JP: Erskineville Town Hall, yeah. So it was a different world, and definitely living here, you felt like you were much closer to council. Under Sydney City Council,

you don't, you feel like you're part of this big thing where we are not really the major focus sort of thing. Not complaining, I think that's just the way it is. I mean, it's a CBD, it's a major international city. So Labor controlled the council, it was a Labor dominated council. I was active in the Labor Party at that stage.

SA: Even over in-

04:55 JP: I'd been the secretary of the Manly branch of the ALP, and then moved over to this area where obviously ALP had a lot more success. The council was dominated by right wing Labor kind of people who'd just accepted, they just took those roles, without even necessarily, some of them obviously very active in their communities, some maybe less so they just were ladder climbing, I suspect. Anyway, I was part of the left of ALP and I thought local Labor needed a rocket up and a lot of left wing people felt the same way. They took too many things for granted, I think, and just assumed that they'd always been in power and wield it. So I was part of a push to get more left wing people in there, and we were largely successful, I think we did get the numbers on council, not that really changed things very much. Vic was a really good mayor and we supported Vic as mayor.

SA: And did you feel that a lot of the community was made up by Labor activists?

06:14 JP: I mean, this is totally, no, just Labor people, people who just knew that there was part of the culture around here. It was a lot of public housing, there's a lot of poorer people as well and this is where I went off track before, the demographics of this area have changed dramatically. And it was an area where there was a lot more public housing, a lot more, I suppose blue collar, less educated workers on lower income, and they could afford to live here and had lived here for generations. The Eveleigh Railway Workshops down the end of the street here, and my understanding is when you look around Erskineville, so many of the houses are traditionally one bedroom or small two bedroom places. They were built for the workers down at Eveleigh Railway Workshops. Now, no one who works for the railways down here can afford to live here anymore, not on their wage. So that's kind of one way of thinking about the way it's changed.

SA: So you are very close to the Green Ban Park, and you've been very involved with a few other, well by the sounds of, a lot of key people. So what was on the site when you moved here in the 1990s?

07:38 JP: Just two vacant blocks of land separated by Albert Street, and on the eastern side there's a smaller park and that was always kind of greener and better maintained. On the other side where the large park is, that was very much less maintained. Now, sometimes both of those parks were used, people just parked there.

SA: Parked as a car park.

08:03 JP: Yeah, it wasn't like a proper car park, but people parked cars there when it suited them and there wasn't anything to really stop them. And the bigger park was not totally green, there was a lot of rubbly kind of messy ground, because there'd been buildings on those parks. Originally, there'd always been buildings there.

SA: Right. When did they get knocked down?

08:29 JP: In the '70s, and if you go along Erskineville Road, you'll see there's a couple of spots all along the road and some of them have been built on now, but opposite the shops there's a little park there.

SA: Which that's a community garden, right?

08:49 JP: No, the community garden is another one a bit further up, but opposite of the shops, there's a green space there. My understanding that that was originally developed, and that further up there's where the community garden is and then there's where the parks is. And then further up the road on the corner of Wilson Street and Erskineville Road, there was what was used as a car park for a long time, now it's a block of flats. They were all buildings that had been knocked down in the '70s as part of the, I think it was called the Department of Main Roads, their intention to widen Erskineville Road, and any time you walk down to Erskineville Road in the afternoon, you can see their failed project.

09:40 I don't really know the ins and outs of because was before my time, but traffic's a big problem here. And one of the traditions that I talk about is the road closures on the other side of Erskineville Road, Rochford, and George, and Morrissey and everything like that. That was a result of people using rat runs, avoiding King Street and running down there, and really the streets are too small for a lot of traffic. So you've got kids in that you don't want cars screaming down your road, so people just blocked them off, it was amazing and this was before my time was in the...

SA: You mean just the community blocked them off.

10:24 JP: Totally. Put lounges at the end of Union Street saying like, no way, go away. Yeah, and it was a Labor government and they got into a big fight with the council and whatever. In the end, the people won and those road closures were maintained. So road traffic was a problem, they wanted to widen Erskineville Road, Lee Rhiannon's mother, Freda Brown, she came to one of our early meetings and a very good speaker. She was born in a house that was on the larger park there in 1923 and was evicted in 1978.

SA: When they tore the buildings down.

11:12 JP: Tore the buildings down. So I don't know why they did it that way, but anyway, just whatever they could buy, they bought and knocked down, and then left others for... I don't know why, there was obviously some reasons, and this is the way I understand the story. So you might have other people who've got a different perspective on it but my understanding is they looked at it and realised, "If we're going to continue on with the road widening, we'll have to knock down the Town Hall and the Catholic church down St. Mary's, down the Swanson Street there. It wasn't feasible, and obviously never was feasible, so I don't know why they bothered just ruining a whole bunch of people's lives for the sake of it. But in the end, we came out of it ahead I guess because we got some parks and there weren't a lot of parks around here.

SA: Well, there weren't a lot of parks.

12:08 JP: Well, look, we had some stats, I don't have them in front of me now, but we had the lowest amount of green space per capita in Australia. And people questioned that and I think they questioned, and I think it's one of those things where you can define your precinct and say, oh, well, we definitely did have it, and that was the government's own figures and that was a thing that we kept on saying, "We've got less green space than anyone else and they're wanting to take it from us."

SA: And there's a lot of people moving into the area because of...

12:40 JP: Yeah. Well, nothing like it has been the last few years, there was no high-rise developments or anything like that happening. So I think it was just like, "Hey, this is an area where we all live close together and it is good to have a park where..." And you can just see now, it's so nice to see people just sit down, and relax, and sit in the sun and read a book, or have a chat with their friends or whatever. So we did have a lack of green space, I think it was actually before- Because one of the things when we first moved in here, and I can't remember exactly, but it would've been early '90s, I was tree planting down at Sydney Park because that was when South City Council was reclaiming the old brick pits that are now award-winning parks and beautiful parks. So the council have done a great job in developing those. So we were planting trees down there. So a lot of the trees that are in Sydney Park were planted by locals, but that wasn't an open space at that time. So there was very little parkland around here.

SA: So sounds like you firmly placed yourself within the community when you first moved in, lots of community activities.

14:08 JP: Yeah, I was always community worker, I worked in Labor market programs, home, worked in domestic violence support programs over at Redfern. We were kind of active in the community. We saw ourselves as wanting to be active in the community, and I was also in the Labor Party and quite active in the Labor Party, and I think that was kind of a bit of a... Not that I had any political ambitions, but I just liked being involved in the local politics, and we seemed, as I said before, I met some people here and we had a goal of trying to make South Sydney Council more of a progressive council.

SA: So to the parks. So basically, one was the smaller park on the...

14:53 JP: Eastern side.

SA: Eastern side, was pretty green, the other park was just rubble.

JP: A big mess, yeah.

SA: Sometimes used as a car park.

JP: Yeah, the top part of it was more green, and the bottom part of it was more rubbly and things like that.

SA: What happened?

JP: One day in...

SA: And what year, roughly?

JP: What year was it?

SA: 1992.

15:17 JP: 1992 in July they put a sign up just saying for sale, James [sic: Jones] Lang Wotton, a big sign. And Sue tells the story that she said, "I was driving home on Friday night and I saw that sign, I went home and I said to Jack, they're selling in the parks." Anyway, so they turned up the next day.

SA: To your place here?

JP: No, I wasn't involved at all at that stage. They just sat around the park one Saturday and just, I think they had a petition, don't sell this park.

SA: Just the two of them.

15:58 JP: Yeah, and that was the start of the campaign.

SA: Can I just say who we talking about here?

JP: Yeah, Jack Carnegie and Susan Kennett, they were both community workers also. I didn't know them at the time, but they just took the initiative. Jack was a very interesting character, he was like a foundation member of the Greens party. I think there's a story that the first Greens meeting in New South Wales, the first formal one, that started the Greens Party in New South Wales, was held at Leichhardt Town Hall and Jack was one of the three people who organised that meeting. He had been in the Labor Party and because I was active in the Labor Party, he was always very fond of telling me, "Well, you haven't been in the Labor Party unless you've been expelled from the Labor Party," and of course, Jack had been expelled from the Labor Party. He supported Nick Origlass over in... I think Leichhardt Council it was maybe at the time and some others.

17:14 And Sue tells that it was just really the start of the Greens getting properly organised here. So that would've been in the '80s, but it was around the same time that Peter Baldwin was bashed, it was quite like there were internal ructions within the Labor Party. And Jack was not part of the bashing Peter Baldwin, but he was certainly on the side of, "We want more from the Labor Party than what we're getting." So he got involved in establishing the Greens. But I was a Labor person, I always had been. I think that combination worked quite well in the sense that because I was quite active, and I'd been involved in, at the time, I worked for Addison Road Community Centre and that place in the early '90s was a total mess. A right wing ethnic group had taken over, and they went through and they sacked the childcare coordinator, the Legs Off the Wall theatre, the Sidetrack theatre coordinator, they sacked all of the coordinators of the programs and they came up. I was working in the Skillshare, the Labor market program. They sacked our boss.

18:34 Told me to take the job and because I've got a foreign name, they said, "Well, you're a wog, you'll be okay." So we went on strike for a week and then had a massive fight for six months. So the first part of this campaign I wasn't involved in, because I was in a shit fight over at Addison Road Community Centre. So after that though, I did get involved, and part I've got to be honest, a part of what my involvement was, was

getting the ALP active in that campaign. There was some funny stories with Jack and Vic, because Jack didn't necessarily pull any punches. I think there was one story where Jack was attacking some of the local councillors over something or other, not the Green Ban Park, but something.

19:28 And Jack offended Vic to the extent where Vic said, "That's it. We are not dealing with Erskineville Save the Past community anymore. We're not dealing with Jack Carnegie, he can go and fuck himself, he can't talk to our people like that," blah-blah-blah, like, "We run the show here, pull your head in." So that was quite a funny thing, they got over it eventually, and I think maybe my involvement probably helped build some bridges there because it wasn't seen by Labor as just like a Greens thing, it was a genuine community thing, they had people from all over the place.

SA: So they started up there Sue Kennett, which is Jack's...

JP: Partner.

SA: Partner at the time.

JP: Yeah.

SA: So they were out there, just the two of them getting people to sign petition.

20:18 JP: They just drafted up a really simple petition, save his part, and then they got contact details and started. So I think early on there was Michael Clifford and Carol Bunt (sounds like) . They were people who got involved very early on, and Amanda who lived across the road and a couple of other people who... There was a lot of people involved, but that was the start of getting a group together, and after that they formed the Save the Parks Committee and that was the structure that we had.

SA: So you joined that fairly soon.

20:57 JP: Yeah, I got involved in that. It was good from my perspective, because it was a genuine grassroots group, it wasn't a hierarchy, it wasn't seen as anyone was using it to get a better profile so they could run for council or anything like that. No, but

the people do that sort of stuff, and we had very flat structure and purposely, and at the time I was studying community education. So I did document the parks campaign, really as a part of a number of university assignments, which were fairly flexible I guess. So I just did a history of it, and then I analysed and it also informed my actions during the campaign and the things that we did from a... There was a South American Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire was quite famous in radical education circles.

22:1 And he very much informed my perspective on it, and part of that was a couple of things that always kept in my head. and one of them was a community must be for itself. So when you look at things like green space ratios and things like that and say, "You've got to look at the broader city," and think, "Well, yeah, okay, we'll look at the broader city, but we're going to look at our backyard first." So you need to stand up for yourself before you can see things in perspective, I think. That's certainly the way I saw it. The other thing I really got from Paulo Freire was the use-- And this is in pre-internet days, was the use of pictures. So we took pictures, we had a very good photographer who was involved in the campaign, and we made poster boards of different kind of activities and that was an aid to discussion.

23:03 So when we were doing letter writing, or stalls or whatever, we'd have those things up and people would look at those. People are always fascinated in looking at photos of their local area and things that are happening in their own area, and out of that would be dialogue. The way that links into the Freirian stuff is that, he had a number of notions, but one of his notions that stuck in my mind was that the knowledge comes through dialogue. That the way we create knowledge is by talking with each other, and there's a whole bunch of things that have to be taken into consideration in terms of trust and whatever. But in the end, that's certainly something that I believe that knowledge doesn't necessarily come from a book, it comes from our interactions with other people.

23:49 And I think that kind of informed our campaign. It certainly gave me a perspective that I could see the structure that we were operating in, and because this was a campaign that went on for four years, it took a long time and a lot of people came and went. And Jack started to get shitty with some people who would come and he wouldn't trust them until they proved that they were going to be in there for the long haul. But a lot of people weren't there for the long haul. And in the end I think we all recognised, well, they came, they helped, but in the end it was about half a dozen of us. Well, four or five of us that were the main people who kept the torchlight burning.

I think particularly me and Jack tic-tacked on really being the one who's going to be sitting up at night trying to work out what we do next. Because four years, it's kind of like a recipe for burnout, you can just get over it and a lot of people did. So it was good that we had a core group and we talked about that.

SA: Because that was actually going to be one of my questions. How on earth do you keep people motivated and active for that long?

25:06 JP: Yeah. So that was a constant theme. There was a couple of key things that all happened in the first year, and one of them was the auction for the parks.

SA: Yes. Tell me about that.

JP: There's a good picture, and we've got a lot of good media out of that, and Michael Clifford, who ended up becoming -- last I heard he was Secretary of the Labour Council in Queensland. He's like a union activist. There's a nice photo of him running this auction, they auctioned off Hyde Park and it was like a publicity, because we're always looking at how do we get some media, and they auctioned off Hyde Park. And that got a bit of media and that was the day before the auctions, and then the day of the auction really only about... I wasn't there, but since -- I wasn't at the auction, there was like half a dozen people turned up to the auction and they basically said, "Yeah, bid all you like, but every brick you put down during the day, we'll be tearing down at night." And I think that might have even been before the Green Bans were actually put on it, but around that time...

SA: How far into the campaign would you have been if it was 1992?

26:28 JP: That was like August. Yeah, it was August, I think. Yeah, I've got the flyers there. It was quite early on in the thing, maybe a bit later than that. But there was a lot of focus on that and it was interesting. So many things, and we were going all over the place with time, but it's all right. In the lead up to the auction, there was a bunch of people camped in the park. Firstly, two buses, big buses just turned up and parked themselves in the...

SA: Who were they?

27:08 JP: They were just travellers, they were hippies, they were people who just kind of lived off the land, I guess. Anyway, they were nice people, there was this fascinating story. Two buses just rocked up and sat in the park there, and then a bunch of local people started pitching tents in the smaller park and there's about 20 people living in the park for a couple of weeks there. There's a couple of things, interesting things with that, there's a really lovely photo, you see it in part of the blue friezes there of the Nichols kids. There's like three or four kids there, and one of the kids is not a Nichols (sp?) kid. Well, he wasn't at that time, he was one of the kids from the bus people, but the bus people, they needed to go to the toilet, they needed to have showers and whatever, and the Nichols lived next door to the big park and there was other people as well, just allowed people to use the toilets and the showers. So people got to know each other, and the Nichols ended up fostering one of those kids, who I think lived with them the rest of his life, the rest of his childhood, and I think considered himself part of their family.

SA: That's so strange and it's so interesting that they were so welcomed by the community.

28:44 JP: Yeah. Well, they said we are supporting you and I think we thought, that's probably not a bad idea. Who knows, what are you going to do? You say, "No, we don't want your help." But anyway, that wasn't the attitude, that was like, yeah, the more the merrier. There's interesting things, people ask, "Was there many people opposing?" We had very widespread community support, especially when you pointed out, we have less open space than anyone else, and they want to get rid of it. There's that whole kind of issue, anger, hope, action, and that got people angry.

SA: I found that immensely fascinating, that model, and did that come from that Brazilian?

JP: No, I don't know where that comes from.

SA: But talk about that because-

29:33 JP: Well, if you become a union organiser and you go to Union Organiser School, they'll teach you about issue, anger, hope, action. So that with most issues, what you're trying to overcome is either apathy or fear. People are either apathetic, "Well, what can we do?" Or fearful that they'll be worse off somehow, or they'll get in trouble if they stand up for their rights. And the way you overcome apathy and fear is by getting them angry. So you need to have discussions that allow people to immerse themselves in the problem and maybe get a little bit angry, and that gets them over their apathy and fear.

SA: And that goads them into action?

30:21 JP: I think gives some hope, issue, anger, hope, you've got to see for the future, and that varied throughout the campaign. If we show community support, maybe we'll stop the auction, maybe the government would withdraw, maybe we'll get the Labor Party to commit to saving the parks if they ever get elected again. And then with that hope, give some action, write this letter, sign this petition, knock on this door, tell these people to come to the meeting, you know what I mean?

SA: Yes.

JP: I think it's very much a natural model really, when you get into the thick of a fight.

SA: Who owned the land?

31:11 JP: Department of Main Roads.

SA: Right, okay. So they wanted to sell it off because they had...

JP: They'd made a mistake by acquiring it, and now they wanted to recoup their losses, basically.

SA: Yeah. Okay, so the buses.

31:30 JP: Yeah, there was another story about the camping and that. There was -- and he lived just a couple of doors up from me, a guy, and I can't remember his proper name, and I'm pretty sure he's probably dead, because he was a fairly serious drug user, heavy drug user. But he was an old school, traditional people, and as I say, I can't remember his name, but he called himself the Erko Kid, and he put flyers up around the telegraph poles, just slagging us off saying, "This shouldn't be a park, you yuppies. We need public housing, we need more housing." So that was a reasonable argument, it shouldn't be parks, it should be housing. It always was housing before they knocked the houses down. So it was really kind of a little bit sad sometimes, because he was a bit off the air, but I think the first time the television cameras turned up, Channel 10 or something like that turned up, who do they interview? The Erko Kid, not good.

SA: I think it might have been a sketch of the Erko Kid in costume, is it?

32:59 JP: No, that's just a picture that I put instead of a photo of him. I think probably in the end, quite a tragic figure, but he did cause problems, because he'd go up there and abuse the campers and start a fight, started a fist fight up there where people were injured, but pretty sure the police weren't called or anything. It was all like, "Let's not be seen as troublemakers," whatever. But yeah, he was a pain. So we had widespread community support apart from the Erko Kid. So the auction was held, a lot of people thought that. So we stopped the auction, bids stopped when people said, "You buy this, you're buying problems," and then we got the Green Bans on it and people thought, "Well, that's it we won."

SA: So tell me about the grant, how did that come about?

33:58 JP: It was just, I think a letter and a phone call with Andrew Ferguson, who was the secretary of, I think the construction division of the building trades group of unions, the CFMEU, and we met with him. He agreed to that, but he had an ongoing proviso, which was something that we needed to maintain, because it was probably the end of '92 or early '93 where they came on board. He said they would support it as long as there was community support. So we had to demonstrate ongoing community

support. So that was part of the drive for us is that, "Well, we better have another meeting to show Andrew that people are still supporting it because-

SA: Andrew?

34:53 JP: Andrew Ferguson. And he was great, he was really on silent, but he was honest as well, he said, "Look, bit of bluff here, we can put a Green Ban on it, it doesn't mean there's some fucking scab company doesn't come and build it, it's not necessarily a guarantee." So he was honest like that and we all understood that. So the next cab off the rank, and I think they've set the government back when they failed to sell it at the auction. So I assume the way they did it, they must have worked out how to approach each other, but St. Vincent de Paul came on board.

SA: Came on board in what kind of way?

35:35 JP: With the government and said, "Well, we'll use that facility." And what they told me, and I had a number of meetings with them, a couple of us had a number of meetings with them. They were saying that they wanted to build an annex to Matthew Talbot Hostel, and Matthew Talbot Men's Hostel is in Talbot Lane in Woolloomooloo. Big famous facility, from my perspective anyway, in Sydney, for homeless men. They wanted to build an annex here, and in exchange for our support for that development, they would not develop, they'd still own, but they would not develop the smaller park and leave that as a park. And from there on, the government just jumped on that. So when we were doing all these letter writing, the government would say, "You've been given a resolution to this problem. Why don't you accept the reasonable offer that St. Vincent de Paul has made?"

SA: So would St. Vincent de Paul were they proposing to buy the land?

36:42 JP: They would buy the land, they would develop the larger site, and leave the other site through their goodwill as a park. And they thought that was a good deal. We had a number of community meetings about it in the park, and people said, "No, why would we have got less than anyone else? Why would we give it away, there'd be plenty of other spots around town where if the government really wanted this facility,

they could make it, they don't have to take our green space. There's plenty of old warehouses you could convert or whatever."

37:17 Anyway, so we didn't like the idea, but we did some mad things. We did one particularly mad thing. Well, I think it was good fun, we had what we called... Because Easter was coming up, and this is just the way that we worked, was always trying to think of publicity stunts, things that we could get. And we always got good coverage from the local ABC, the Telegraph, the Daily Telegraph was quite good. Better than the Herald, to be honest but the Herald gave us some coverage and all of the local kind of rags that were around at that time. There was a Newtown Bridge, the Glebe, the Inner West Courier, the Green Left Weekly, the whatever. There was a lot of little community newspapers. We always got a good run in those, you just write the article to send it to them and they'd print it.

SA: Sydney had the South Sydney Council, didn't they have a...

38:09 JP: There was South Sydney Herald which is always run by the Uniting Church, I think. Anyway, so there was lots of those little publications. What were we talking about?

SA: We were talking about St. Vincent de Paul, the annex and then the campaigns around that, and you were just about to talk about a campaign.

38:37 JP: Yeah, sorry. So we were always looking for publicity. So we thought, Easter's coming up and got St. Vincent de Paul, let's have a Last Supper in the park. So we had this Last Supper in the park where we all, we wrote a passion play, and we just got all sheets and dressed up in togas, were like apostles, I guess. We had a big long table where we had a big sausage sizzle going on, and we did this passion play, and then on the bigger park where we had scores of them, would've been 50, 60, white crosses. We put all these white crosses all across the park there, it looked mad, and one of them was a really big cross, most of them were just a couple of feet high. It looked quite mad, and we had a really good time. We got very little publicity, we got a run in the Glebe or something like that, and the feedback that I got from the older, more conservative people was that it was offensive. And then from the other end of the scale, there were people who thought it was actually an event run by St. Vincent de Paul. So it

was just like, "Hmm, yeah, that didn't kind of work out." It was good fun, but I suppose you don't intend to offend people, you want to get them on your side. So yeah, that was a bit of a lesson, but the mood of it was let's try anything because if you sit around trying to think of the perfect answer, you're probably not going to find it. And that was the other kind of thing that goes in my head, was sort of like a motive is that if you don't know what to do, do something rather than nothing.

SA: Well, it sounded like you had a bit of pressure as well that you had to keep the community engaged in all of this.

40:43 JP: So there was, that was a need to keep the community engaged, there was a fear that if we just let it lie that we'd wake up one day and the tractors would be in there or the bulldozers or they'd just start developing it.

SA: So what happened with St. Vincent de Paul?

JP: Took them a while, but eventually they just sent us a letter saying...

SA: Sorry.

JP: Yeah. Saying that they're considering their options and that was the end of it.

SA: It just petered out?

41:21 JP: Hung around for a while, hung around for a long time, but eventually they just made the decision not to go ahead with it. And at that time, we thought that they were definitely going to go ahead with it and that we had lost. That we did kind of figure that that's the way it was going to pan out. That one day we wouldn't even know that they'd bought it and that they'd just start building on it or just start knocking, cutting trees down, I think.

SA: So how far into the campaign was that?

JP: Like '93, '94.

SA: Right.

JP: I've got it all on the PowerPoint.

SA: On the PowerPoint.

JP: Which I'd recommend you watching if you have access to it.

SA: Definitely. In fact, we can...

JP: Put it together or something.

SA: Or when this gets published on the website, we can link to the-

JP: Yeah, I think it would be a good idea, because that's kind of got a lot of pictures in it which will help people.

SA: Yeah. So what happened after that then?

41:25 JP: Look, again, it was an ongoing thing of just trying to keep community engagement and making sure that the union was still on side, which they were, but they wanted to see ongoing community support. So we had regular meetings. One of the things that we had, and again, maybe getting towards the end of it, we had a big Christmas fair. Again, it was this sort of like, "What do we do?" So we come up with the idea of having a fair day. So we had a really nice daggy fair day with... And straightaway, as soon as we said that we were going to do it, whatever they were calling the source, the DMR or the RTA or whatever, straightaway sent this really heavy letter threatening us that we were not given permission to hold any event on their land, whatever, and that we didn't have the appropriate insurance, blah-blah-blah, whatever.

43:27 I think the council ended up giving us kind of insurance coverage. You've got to have public liability if you're running a public event or something. But we had a bunch of stalls and mostly community agencies and things like that. We had our own stall, and our own stall was any ideas, give us ideas on what we can do that we were constantly

asking people for their thoughts on what we should do in the campaign, and I think that reflected the way we operated. We didn't think that we had a magic bullet, we knew that we were pushing it uphill, and more people who were involved, the better, the more people who gave their ideas the better. And not every idea was a good idea, but at least it was people thinking about it.

44:14 So anyway, we had that fair, and I remember one of the things we did was plant trees in the grubby part of the bigger park and that was on the Saturday. It was a really good day, and we had really daggy kind of things, like throw a ball at a bunch of cans, egg and spoon races. That really basic silly stuff, but it was good and it went down really well. People had a good time, had probably had big barbecue there and whatever.

SA: And lots of people came.

44:47 JP: Yeah, it was a good little event. Nothing like Newtown Festival or anything, it was pretty daggy, but it was good and it ticked the box that we wanted to tick, which was reminding everyone that we're still there and that we hadn't won yet. Somewhere along the line, we got-- Well, very early on there was Paul, I can't remember his name. Anyway, one of the Labor MLCs, Paul O'Grady, who's since passed away, he must have been the Judy (sounds like) kind of MLC for this area, and he was coming to the meetings very early on and he made an- And I don't think he had got it okayed by anyone, but he just announced that if Labor won the next election, and the building and the sites hadn't been sold, that Labor would give them to us.

SA: Really, so he just found that issue and pursued it?

45:53 JP: Maybe he lived locally or whatever, but he was involved, and of course we had Andrew Refshauge, who was a local member of parliament and state-wide, and Peter Baldwin, who was the federal member. Now again, I was very active in the ALP, so I knew both of them quite well, and I did help build some bridges between, particularly Michael, and Jack, and Sue, and Andrew and Peter. We had a barbecue at one stage just to bring them all together, and that was my idea I think, well, we'll need their support. The way we win this is we somehow hang out until whenever it was, the '95 state election, and if we can get a commitment out of Labor, that's how we win and

that's how eventually we did win. But it was still years away and we had to keep on convincing the Labor Party as well that it was worthwhile for them to support. And Andrew Refshauge came to a number of events there, he was very on side.

47:15 Well, I'll go to the end of it was like, and then we won, Labor won the '95 election by a handful of votes by one seat, and with that, I'm saying to everyone, "Huh. Labor has won, we've won," and Jack and Sue, who were both not Labor people, they're saying, "Yeah, you think so?" And I always remember, such a thing they wouldn't renege, would they? And Shaun Mackin (sounds like), who was one of our progressive Labor people on council, after the election he was working for Andrew Refshauge and he was telling, Michael Knight was the minister, he's saying, "Knight's people, they just don't get it." He says, "They don't think we are going to get the parks," and he's saying that to me, and Jack and Sue were saying, "Are they're fucking renegeing?" I said, "Ahh!" And it was a bit of a concern, and it did take a year before they actually did hand them over to us formally.

SA: Had you been having conversations with them and trying to get the verbal guarantee?

48:20 JP: Yeah, and we had from Andrew's office and from Shaun says, "Don't worry, we're going to get this," and Andrew was like, deputy premier, and it was a solid commitment that had been made, but it wouldn't be the first time that someone made a commitment and wasn't able to deliver. But he was able to deliver and we got there eventually, and I think people like Shaun and that helped us in the back rooms there in telling Michael Knight's office that actually this was a very important issue for the deputy premier. So I don't know, I probably missed out on a whole bunch of stuff there.

SA: So what did that feel like, winning?

49:07 JP: Relief, really, I think. Yeah, it was just relief that we'd gotten there and I think we were pretty much over it as well. I don't know how things would've turned out if Labor hadn't won that election. I think we still would've kept on going, but a big bunch of our energy would've gone because the closer we got to the election, the more you felt, "Yeah, we can do, if you just got to go a little bit further and we'll make it," because it was this ongoing thing of trying to come up with ideas for publicity, for come up with

ideas for community engagement. And our hope, [inaudible 00:49:50] hope, was that Labor would win and we'd win the campaign.

SA: So were you lobbying the Liberal members as well?

JP: Yeah. Well, lobbying...

SA: But you didn't feel like-

50:09 JP: Yeah, look, there was a couple of things, and I wasn't involved in either of them, but I know about them. Wal Murray was the National Party member, he was the Roads Minister, he was the National Party leader and had no connection with this community whatsoever, obviously. And had been named in ICAC as a person responsible for creating an environment of conducive to corruption on the north coast where he came from. So we were a bit sussing him, anyway, Jack and Sue and a bunch of people just turned up at some kind of road opening up on the North Shore and got a bit of media actually early on saying, "Why are you selling our parks in Erskineville?" I'm sure Wal Murray thought, "Who the fuck are you and why are you here?"

51:14 But then there was another one where after he retired, what was his name? Andrew West? Anyway, he became the Roads minister, he was a Liberal, and there was a sort of thing where Vic actually rang up Jack and said, "Look, I know you guys are going to be attacking the minister up on King Street. Don't be idiots, don't yell at him, just try and talk to him about it." So we took his suggestion and instead of yelling at the minister, had a discussion with him where he said, "Hey, when I was at uni, I lived in this area, so I know this area and I support you," but he couldn't get it through the head kickers in government. He didn't say, "I support you," I don't think, I think he says, "Look, I'm very sympathetic to you, to your cause."

52:12 So there was that kind of lobbying to some extent, but there was one example. Fahey became the- Well, Fahey was the premier after Nick Greiner got ICAC'd, and there was a bi-election on the North Shore, which included Mosman, and there was a local issue in Mosman about some green space, just coincidentally. So here we go, in the paper, there's John Fahey saying, "We are not about taking passive recreation areas away from the community." That was his quote to the North Shore when that was

exactly what they were doing here. So we publicised that, we had lots and lots of letter writing, we've got thousands of letters just from that. And she said, "This is what John Fahey says, but look what he's doing to us." Just getting people angry.

SA: So you got some mileage out of that?

53:11 JP: Yeah, I think so, but look, we had no hope with them. We didn't really believe that they were interested, and it was just real politics. There's no point in them wooing voters here, because they're either going to be... It's the left wing area, it's either going to be Labor or it's going to be Greens. It'll be a long time before it becomes Liberal Party, even now, I think.

SA: You were talking on the video actually about something interesting with signage that you did with Wal Murray.

JP: Yeah.

SA: So what was that strategy about?

53:46 JP: Well, there was an early one, it's just like caress their egos or something or name the problem, but we named the parks. The bigger park was Wal Murray Park, and the smaller park was John Fahey Park, and I think at the opening- And again, at one sort of event, we had someone with a chainsaw cutting down the John Fahey sign or something. And it got a picture in the local paper, I think maybe got some... Telegraph had some good coverage as well. Yes, we got a bit of media out of that, but it was just a stunt to...

SA: Try and get some traction with the media.

54:29 JP: Yeah, totally. Yeah, it was just a cheap stunt. And we had, I think it was Russell, I can't remember his second name, and I think he was Siobhan's partner, and I'm pretty sure he was the sign writer. There was some really good signage that we had. So that was just typical of the sort of thing, we had a really good photographer, I can't remember his name. We tried to track him down recently, I couldn't find him.

Russell had no idea where he'd been, but lots of people like that who had actual genuine skills, who could help with things like that, which was just a real relief that you didn't have to worry about that. Now having said that, there's at one stage, there's picture in the PowerPoint of a whole bunch of people outside Parliament House in Macquarie Street. And they're all holding signs, and Sue says, "I made every one of those signs."

SA: And there were a lot of signs.

JP: It was like 20 or 30 or something like that.

SA: So she made all the signs for the...

55:32 JP: For that rally, yeah. Because that's how it was organised, it was just on a needs basis and not really hierarchical at all. It was just like, "Well, who's going to talk to the Herald? Who's going to do that press release? Who's going to organize the letter writing stall this weekend?" Who's going to get people along to X, Y, Z? So it was depending on what skills people had, but also who could do what at any particular time.

SA: Gosh. I mean, I'm really flabbergast.

JP: So not really very well structured, it was very loosely structured, I guess is what I'm trying to say.

SA: Well, you're clearly immensely successful. I mean, if you can keep that campaign going for so many years and with the outcome that you got, I think it was amazing. So tell me about some of the meetings and where did you have the meetings?

56:33 JP: Generally in the park. At first, there was the PCYC, which isn't there anymore, but it's across the road literally from the parks where the Woolworths is now, and there's a block of units and some shopfronts there, that was the PCYC, and the back of it, I don't know if that was part of the PCYC, but for years it was kind of where they made Mardi Gras floats. It'd always be people preparing for Mardi Gras, building

their floats in where the Woolworths is now. In the PCYC, there was a hall there, and that was a good meeting hall and a lot of community meetings were held there but that's gone now, obviously. But fairly early on, we kind of decided, "No, let's not have them there, let's just have them in the park." So meetings tended to be, events of some sort, usually a barbecue or something, usually on the Saturday afternoon.

SA: And then you would invite the community to come along and then...

57:36 JP: Yeah. So it was like all pre-internet and all pre social media and whatever, which really, now, when I think about it, I think, "God, yeah, it's a totally different world." And in a lot of ways kind of better for organising in the sense that the conversations you're having with people were often word of mouth, one-on-one, neighbours talking to neighbours, which are much more effective than some post on Facebook. We'd have phone trees, lists of phones, and we're always getting people's phone numbers. No one had mobile phones. Well, no one that we knew, maybe some people had big bricks that they carried around and that, but if you look at our phone lists, they were all just landlines, and phoning around, getting people to come along, letting people know, asking if they could ring up 10 people, blah-blah-blah, those sorts of things.

58:40 And I think that worked reasonably well, and of course, there'd be times where people just fell out of the loop, or whatever or missed out, but generally, people were aware that the issue was going on. And as I said, we had widespread support, there weren't that many people like the Erko Kid, most people were on side and supportive. And spec on the Erko Kid, part of that tension was just typical of the tension within a transitioning area I think. That the area was becoming more gentrified, it was just the reality, and that was long before the gentrification that's happened now. And I guess people like me and Tan (sounds like) were part of that, we were educated people from a different kind of area, totally, who were moving into the area, maybe bringing our values and attitudes as well. We felt part of the community, we were community workers. We thought that we knew the community quite well, but there was a resentment, I think, and like the Erko Kid to pay him his due, he just saw the people camping in the park as yuppies, blow ins. I mean, the people on the bus were, they were definitely blow ins. I mean, I don't know where they came from, but they came from Nimbin or something.

SA: So had they known about what was going on in the park?

JP: They got wind of it somehow.

SA: And that was the reason that they turned up?

JP: Yeah.

SA: Wow, that's incredible. How long did they stay for?

1:00:22 JP: There was various vehicles, mainly was two big ones and one that left, and came back, and left and then left entirely. And then there was one that was there for a long time, for a year, for sure. It was kind of bizarre, but if you look at some of the photos, you'll see the buses there.

SA: You're talking about the community support, what was the business support like?

1:00:59 JP: Quite good. Yeah, that's a good point. With the Fair Day, for example, I knocked on all of the local businesses saying, "Do you want to donate something for the campaign?" And I'm sure there's some people who said no, but the vast majority were really keen, and Maggie's Thai was a popular one. There was a few different places, most of them don't exist anymore, but most of the places, the restaurants would give a voucher, whatever. And there were just other bits and pieces that got nothing really more than 20, 40, 50 bucks or something.

1:01:42 I always remember though, where that other Thai restaurant is now next to the laundromat down there, there was another restaurant, and the people there, I remember, I knew the guy who ran it, I can't remember his name now, but it's really good, really nice couple ran that place. It was like a cafe, but a restaurant at night, and I stuffed up, the voucher was for dinner at their place. So he tells me a couple of weeks later, he says, "The people who won that prize, they turned up and they had four people and they ate everything on the menu and then at the end of the night gave me the voucher. It's cost me like \$127 or something.

SA: Oh no.

1:02:35 JP: No, so we pitched in, we got the money, and we reimbursed him and said, "Look, sorry, it was my mistake." But no, local business was good. I mean, of course not the real estate agents because they were only interested in taking, not giving.

SA: Okay. I mean, because I live in Erskineville and I think that it feels, well certainly back then, it feels like there's a bit of a divide between Newtown and Erskineville. So was the community in Newtown supportive of what was happening?

1:03:15 JP: Yeah, totally. We didn't make a distinction, to be honest, because we often had letter writing stalls up in King Street, mostly down in Erko, but sometimes up in King Street. Now it's funny, I only realised recently, because I always assumed that the division between Erskineville and Newtown was the railway line, and I think it generally is. But up here where the Woolworths is now, that's Newtown.

SA: Really?

JP: Yeah. Gowrie Street is the divide. So I didn't even know where Newtown began and Erskineville ended sort of thing. I think we saw as long as we were on this side of King Street, that's definitely part of our patch. If we went over into further towards Camperdown, yeah, that's getting away from where we live. But no, I don't think we made a big distinction, it was all kind of the neighbourhood.

SA: Okay, and did you campaign at other events, like Newtown Festival or some of the other local?

JP: Yeah, we would've had stalls.

SA: Like spring fairs and festivals that were around?

JP: I'm just trying to remember, I don't think a lot.

SA: Because Jack would've been working at the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre at that stage.

JP: It was before Jack was at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre.

SA: Okay.

1:04:43 JP: So I don't know when he started at the Neighbourhood Centre, it would've been in the '90s.

SA: Yes, because I started in 1999 and he was definitely there at least for a couple of years I think.

JP: Yeah, but when I first met Jack, he was doing the community transport over at South Sydney Community Aid, and I think he went to Newtown Neighbourhood Centre...

SA: From there.

JP: From there.

SA: Yes. I think you're right, I think that's right. So that would've been maybe the '87 or '88 maybe.

JP: Definitely in the '90s, and definitely after '92, because I didn't start working in Redfern until '93.

SA: Right, yeah.

JP: So look, we probably did, we would hope, but I can't remember specifically.... When did Newtown Festival start?

SA: I should know this. I think the first year was 1987 or '88.

JP: So we definitely would've been there in some form or other.

SA: Yeah, okay.

1:06:03 JP: My memory is that we probably latched onto someone else's table, and we just had, at someone else's stall and just had a little bit of their bench space or whatever. Either a Labor or a Green or some other community, maybe even the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre one, because Trish Wallace, who was coordinator back then, she was very active in the campaign, very supportive. Yeah.

SA: Did she live locally?

JP: Yeah, she must have, and she's in some of the photos, and they did the Newtown Bridge and they did some really good, just supportive kind of coverage. And that was a thing that, maybe it was just us, but I think it had quite good readership.

SA: I think it did.

1:06:44 JP: Yeah, it was a good local community gossip. Well, community newspaper, which had a good perspective on things.

SA: So the slogans that you used for the campaign, did you just continue that slogan, using the space ratio? Was that the main one, the theme that ran through?

JP: Totally, yeah. We've got less than anyone else, and they want to take it, and the slogan was save our parks.

SA: And I guess just thinking about ways of being able to activate around that slogan, coming up with different ideas about how you would bring that forward into some kind of community action.

1:07:41 JP: Yeah, look, again, it was like that theme being, "We've got less than anyone else that they want to take what we've got. That's not right," and most people, I just about everyone we ever spoke to agreed with that notion. And that was a cause for

people to then do a simple thing, like maybe sign a letter. And at the time, I don't know what people say about it now, but at that time, there was a view that a handwritten letter was considered equivalent to 40 people. If someone actually took the time to write out a letter by hand, post it and send it off to a polly, that the polly took that more seriously than just a rotate, just a photocopied thing that someone had put their signature on at the bottom. So we relied a lot on that, I don't know how that kind of perspective works anymore, because how many emails do you have to receive to take it seriously?

SA: And can you remember the very first big meeting in the park? Because there was reference to...

1:08:48 JP: The first big one was the one where- And there's a really beautiful photo of Freda Brown talking there. And she is like Lee Rhiannon's mum, and Lee Rhiannon was a Green senator for New South Wales, and I don't know much about Freda, but she was a very good speaker and really rallied people. I remember for me personally, seeing her speak, I found that inspiring, she pointed out the stupidity of the government's process to knock down their houses when it wasn't necessary, and then when people start to make the best of what they've got, they want to take it away from them again, and that got a lot of people... Yeah.

SA: Were there other speakers as well?

1:09:35 JP: For sure. Typically it would be Jack, there was some guy, people would just come and go. So I remember there was some guy who was some kind of union organiser or something, and he reckoned he had this, and he might have even been the conduit to getting Andrew Ferguson in the first place. So he was speaking, there was other people, I can't even remember. Alistair. There was a bunch of left wing kind of musos around here, traditionally there were, anyway, and was his name Alistair? Anyway, like Billy Bragg type characters who'd just pick up their guitar and sing us a few songs, and that made everyone kind of happy, but nothing to organise, like no full on bands or anything like that.

SA: Yeah. So we did talk about-

1:10:31 JP: Sorry. So we'd get people like Vic and or a local polly or whatever, would come along to a meeting as well and talk.

SA: And by that stage, the Labor you had mended or bridged the relationship between-

JP: Any riff had been healed and they were all-

SA: So Nick was happy to come and talk.

JP: Totally. No, council was really good, and sometimes council helped with letter boxing. There was Edda Boyd who still lives in Erko, I think she was like the South Sydney Council communications officer or something like that, but she was so good.

SA: She's amazing, Edda.

1:11:15 JP: Yeah. Well, I noticed that she actually even still does kind of letter boxing for Sydney Council, which, she's getting on now. But she was really important and really supportive, and personally I felt reassured that we had people like her on the ground who were involved in the council, who weren't in anyone's pocket, who were just employees, but they were supportive. She helped with letter boxing, and she would help with maybe some copying of stuff and help us get some stuff done. Nothing untoward or anything like that, but she definitely was. That sort of person was important, even though she wouldn't get a mention, you know what I mean?

SA: Yeah, she was.

JP: A lot of people like that, a lot of people came and went.

SA: I just wanted to make sure that I've got all the detail about the Green Ban. So the union said, as long as you got community support, that you'd-

1:12:18 JP: If we could demonstrate ongoing community support, they would support us.

SA: Yeah, and which they did and they brought in the Green Ban.

JP: Yeah and there was big signage up.

SA: Can you talk about that?

JP: Yeah. Well, there was a big sign that the union had obviously put up, and it was a big solid thing on big metal poles and just basically saying, "This Parkland is protected by Interim Green Bans, by the Building Trades Group of Unions." Which was fairly clear message that don't built here.

SA: Don't buy here as well.

1:13:00 JP: Totally. It's a funny sort of thing because it wasn't a union campaign, it was a genuine community campaign supported by the union. Would we have won without their support? I don't know. I don't think so, because I think it would've put off a lot of potential developers to think if they're making a decision about what they want to do, do they really want to get into a shit fight with the local community and the CFMU? Probably not, if they could avoid it. The closest that a developer came to overcoming that was the St. Vincent de Paul, and we definitely had meetings where we got Andrew to come along to see what people had to say about it. And he wanted to, and it was good, I thought it was really good, their perspective on things as they didn't want to just do things for the sake of doing them. They wanted to do them if there was genuine community support, because I think they figured the only way that they could win those things was if it was a genuine, it wasn't a game.

SA: Yes, of course.

JP: It was something that people actually cared about.

SA: So when the election came and Labor got in by a small majority, and then they finally handed over the park to council?

1:14:33 JP: South Sydney Council, yeah. That's a funny sort of thing, because I saw Sue and she couldn't remember, and of course Jack's gone, but the idea was that- So this was February '96, so the election was like March '95, and it was February '96 before we actually got it confirmed that they were going to give us the parks. We had signage up saying Handover Day this day, and we had a big barbecue, and I think the Solidarity choir was there, and the council did their own set up, a little platform, a little stage. And we had a sausage sizzle and stalls where people could give their ideas on how to beautify the parks, and what should be done and things like that. And the whole idea was that this was the handover from Andrew Refshauge, the deputy premier, local member to Vic Smith, but Andrew wasn't there. I don't know what happened with Andrew that day, maybe he was sick or something. It was some reason but he was definitely supposed to be there, but he wasn't. So it ended up being Jack and Vic unveiling the plaque instead, and then later on when the friezes were done, which must have been in '98.

SA: Who did that, the council?

1:16:13 JP: Yeah. South Sydney Council did the whole renovation. I think they did a really good job as well, to be honest. Yeah, they took to the friezes, so I remember the artist interviewed Jack and I, we went through the photos and I gave them my journal. So that's what they've done, they picked out the photos and picked out the eyes of things they thought were worthwhile out of that journal and put that together. And then in '98, that's when it was handed over. So when the Friends of Erskineville people called me and said it was the 25th anniversary, well, my idea was it was '96, but they were thinking, "No, it was '98." Well, it was '98 when the park was beautified and opened officially, I guess. But from my perspective, the fight had been won in '96, and after that anything else was cream on top sort of thing.

SA: That was 25 years, so did you have a celebration?

1:17:29 JP: No. Didn't even think about it, I didn't even know. It's just ancient history, honestly. It was a good campaign, I'm proud of it. I walked past there all the time, and I think, isn't it nice. People sitting in the park and you kind of feel, "Well, that was all worthwhile to be part of." But I'm very much conscious that my perspective on that was I played a role in it, a lot of other people did as well, but I always like to spread the love. And it was just a genuine community campaign, anyone who was living here at the time were involved in one shape or other. Some a lot, some less but they're all worthwhile in terms of the support and that support's won it. We can do things, but if it's not a genuine issue, you're not going to win. Or if you do, you won't deserve to win and it won't turn out the way you want. I mean, it was right, it was the right thing to do and we won, so good, but what are you going to do? No, I don't think about it.

SA: I guess after you-

1:18:49 JP: I've had plenty of other fights. Well, actually after that, so Jack and I in particular kept on doing things. So there was one campaign, next thing we knew the Commonwealth Bank were pulling out, the post office were pulling out, I always remember. So we ran a campaign, we couldn't do anything about the Commonwealth Bank, but we ran a campaign to save the post office, which is across the road from where it used to be and that was our win. At first, they told us, go to the Commonwealth Bank, you can pay your bills there or something, I think you could in those days, because we were sort of saying, "Hey, you got a whole bunch of public housing oldies down the street here. They walk up the hill to Erskineville and you're going to take their post office away." And they said, "Go to the Commonwealth Bank," said, "Well, no. Commonwealth Bank's closing as well," and they said, "Go up to Newtown." Anyway, so we won that argument to the extent where they didn't totally knock down their building and they kept-

SA: Which building were they in? Is that the building on the corner, that lovely round?

JP: No.

SA: No, they weren't there.

JP: It's called McCarthy Square, it's where the cafes are. There's a pizza place. And what do they call it? A slip in or sip in or something?

SA: Yeah.

JP: That building was the post office.

SA: Right.

1:20:20 JP: And the deal we got was that they'd moved the post office facility where it is now, into those council owned buildings across the road, and that there would be minor development of that building. And I think the development was fine, it wasn't like massive high-rises, a couple of flats above that space, the McCarthy Square was maintained.

SA: I've just got to point out, those people in that post office are so lovely.

JP: They're nice.

SA: Most friendliest post office I've been to.

1:20:59 JP: No, I've got to say every time I go there, which isn't that often, there's always people lined up. Post offices are important for, I think people running their own little businesses and stuff like that. Yeah.

SA: Did we actually say where the park is?

1:21:16 JP: Probably not. The park's on Erskineville Road, and it's divided by Albert Street. So there's a smaller park on the corner of Erskineville Road and Albert Street on the eastern side. And then the western side going up the hill on the corner of Albert Street and Erskineville Road is the larger park, which then backs onto to the western railway line. And actually is a nice little viewing platform where you can take your kids and out the top there, and it was specifically built that way so that people could look at the trains.

SA: Wow, okay. Probably a lot of people who love it.

1:22:02 JP: The kids would love it. It took your average three year old like, "Oh, look."

SA: So the redevelopment was done by the South Sydney Council.

JP: Totally, yeah.

SA: And then did you people, like the community, have some input into what you wanted?

JP: Yeah, there would've been. There was a whole kind of process. Well, I told you Jack and I worked with the artists, giving them the photos and the text.

SA: But with the plantings, and the swings and...

1:22:36 JP: The swings didn't come until much later. They just did that really nice path away, I think that was-

SA: It's very lovely.

JP: It was well done. Maybe it was an obvious thing to do, but it was well done, I thought. If you look at some of the trees, there's, I don't know what are they? Possum boxes or something. Maybe that was an idea that came out of the community consultation. I mean, basically people wanted a passive recreation area, just a park, green space, a bit of oxygen coming from the trees and the grass. I don't know, but I assume the design of it and that was just done by one of the council staff. And then later on they've gradually done, they put the swings in, which had been really good.

SA: And then there was the merger into the City of Sydney.

JP: Yeah. When did that happen?

SA: I think it was 2004.

1:23:44 JP: So for years the tradition was when it was a Labor government, they'd get rid of South Sydney Council. So that would stack Sydney Council and they'd control it that way, and then when the Liberals got in, they would create South Sydney Council and take all the Labor people out of Sydney City council area. That was pretty much the way it kind of worked, I think. After that, they just got rid of South Sydney Council and no one's bothered to bring it back.

SA: Okay. Well, is there anything that you feel that we haven't covered that we should cover?

1:24:29 JP: Probably, but I can't think of it. I mean, I think the main thing that I'd like to share is that if it's an issue that's widely and deeply felt, if people care about it, do something about it, you can win. And even if you don't win, at least you try, better than being oppressed.

SA: And is the Friends of Erskineville still going?

JP: Yeah. I'm not involved in it. I think I'm a member, I think, but I don't go to any of the meetings or anything like that.

SA: So you've pulled back a little bit on that act of local-

1:25:03 JP: Yeah, I'm just totally selfish doing my own work now. But no, they're a good group. They're just honest citizens who just want to make sure that... Just keeping the bastards honest, really, you need to keep an eye on things. And if it's your community, you should have an involvement in and a say in it. So they're a good group, I think it's hard to keep a group like that going, and you'll always have people who are attracted to it for the wrong reasons or whatever, but no, I think they're good. And things have changed now as well, just with the social media, I think that changes the way people find out about things. So you don't need to go to a Friends of Erskineville meeting to find out about things. You're more likely going to know all about it through

the local Facebook page or through some other local kind of network, but I think those groups are important.

SA: Yeah. Thank you for the interview, it's been a great-

JP: Oh, good. Well, thank you.

SA: Are you happy to this? You feel that we've covered what we-

JP: I think so, yeah. Afterwards, I'm sure there'll be, "I should have said that." But look at the PowerPoint.

SA: Yes, exactly, and we will put a link to that on our website, so thank you.

JP: Thank you.

SA: That's a really great interview.

JP: Cheers.

SA: Thank you.

**Interview ends @1:26:32**