BELIEF
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Name: Ina Heidtman

Date: 11 April 2011

Place: Balmain

Interviewer: Sue Andersen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SA:** **This is Sue Anderson interviewing Ina Heidtman on the 11th of April 2011 for the City of Sydney's Oral History Project, Belief.**

Ina, thanks for doing the interview this morning. I'm wondering whether we could begin by you saying your full name and what year you were born in.

IH: O.K. My full name is Ina ****** Heidtman and I was born on the ****** 1935.

SA: **Right. So you were saying before we switched the tape on that you've lived here for many, many years.**

IH: Yes. I was only about three months old when we came here because my Dad had been killed and Mum bought this house, a big house really, for her and my sister and I and all the family moved in with them. So it was quite a handful at that time for her because she had to go to work too.

SA: **Yes, because you were saying your father passed away.**

IH: He was electrocuted at work.

SA: Right. So he died some years before that, did he?

IH: Oh, yes. Oh, no, no, it was about twelve months between the time he died and she moved in here when his compensation came through.

SA: Right. And when we say "here", we're actually in Ina's house in Balmain here.

IH: Yes.

SA: So, you grew up in Balmain. It would have been a very different Balmain at that particular stage.

IH: It certainly was. You could go out, leave the front door open or, you know, the back door and you knew everybody; it's quite different now, quite different. You find it, you know, a bit strange; the neighbours don't even sort of get to know one another like we used to. But anyway, that's how things change.

2.05 **SA: Yes, it does. And where did you go to school, Ina?**

IH: I went to Rozelle Public School and then I went to Riverside Girls' at Gladesville.

SA: Right, O.K. And growing up – I mean, this would have been – Balmain was a very working class suburb at that point - - -

IH: That's right.

SA: - - - with a lot of wharf workers.

IH: Yes.

SA: Was your father involved in - - -

IH: No, he was a crane driver. Well, it was on the waterfront and he worked on the Harbour Bridge – that was his last job - - -

SA: Right.

IH: - - - working on the Harbour Bridge as a crane driver. Oh, no, that wasn't, it was the second last one 'cause he was killed in the job he went to after that.

SA: Right.

IH: And I was six weeks old, I think, when he was killed and Mum had lost two boys before that. One died in convulsions and the other got

run over and there was only my sister who was older than me who's passed on now.

SA: Right, so you're the - - -

IH: I'm the last.

SA: - - - the last one. Gee, that must have been a terribly hard time for the family at that time.

IH: It was, it was.

SA: Yes.

IH: Yes, this all happened in three years, so two boys and Dad.

SA: So your mother had to sort of get on - - -

IH: Go to work.

SA: Yes. What did she do?

IH: Office cleaning twice a day; … broken shifts, yes.

SA: And did she have her family to - - -

IH: Well, they lived here but they weren't allowed to discipline us. They had a board, they could put anything on it they wanted that we'd done wrong during the day and we'd try to get some of it off by the time she came home but they didn't discipline us, Mum did.

4.13 **SA: That's amazing.**

IH: Mm.

SA: And so, Ina, did you grow up in a – because you've had a very strong political and union activist background.

IH: Mm.

SA: So, was that part of your upbringing?

IH: Yes, because Mum became an organiser for the Miscellaneous Workers Union. They weren't sort of paid jobs in those days but she was an organiser of a certain area in the city – I think it was with the theatre cleaners that she was involved with – but there's something in the Misso's book about her, I remember that.

SA: So strong unionism - - -

IH: Yes.

SA: - - - has been in your family?

IH: Yes.

SA: Yes. And so you were saying before that you left school early to join the union. So, can you tell me about that?

IH: Well, I left school at fifteen because at that time Mum wasn't very well and she couldn't keep working and my sister, she got a job with the Metalworkers Union and she only lasted a week and she ended up with a reoccurrence of rheumatic fever and she was in hospital for twelve months. Well then, when I got to fifteen I just went to work and it happened that she got a phone call one day and they said had I got a job – which I had gone and got one in a hatch, match and dispatch department which I'm glad I never went there – and I went in for an interview and I said I'd like to stay there. It was pretty rough in those days, though.

6.06 **SA: So tell me what your union was with.**

IH: The Wharfies Union, the Waterside Workers Federation. The leadership had only really been - the new leadership had only really been in office really since 1948 and I started there in 1950, so it was, you know, quite an undertaking.

SA: So in what way?

IH: Well, my first job was to go down into the basement and bring up all the minute books and I had to go down a ladder – there was no doorway – and they used to tell me because I was only very young then, they'd say "Well, what we used to do, we used to keep the bodies here in the basement until we had enough money to bury them", you know, and there's all sorts of things they used to say to me. But, oh, anyway we got all the minute books out and then we made charts out of them, all the history was in chart form in the union rooms.

SA: Wow.

IH: Up till when I left.

SA: So you were part of getting all of that history together?

IH: Yes.

SA: So just a brief – and I know that there's already been another oral history done about the union but can you remember, when did they start here in Sydney?

IH: 1872.

SA: Right.

IH: And the Seamans Union started at the same time, some month actually, September 1872 – in Melbourne they started though, not here in Sydney.

SA: So what was it like, what was it like – I mean, you were very young, fifteen years of age, going and working in a - - -

8.01 IH: Well, they used to call it the "louse house" 'cause in the hall it had stools and chairs and people would be lying on them and up at the office they had a grille on the window and a spittoon – I always remember the spittoon but it didn't take long for the leadership to change all that, no.

SA: So at that point they actually had new leadership in the union?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: And why, what happened?

IH: Well, they set about – well, first of all in 1943 the bull system had been defeated and then this leadership developed out of that, you know, and Tom Nelson was elected as the secretary in 1948. He'd held some other position – I can't remember now – prior to that but in 1948 they really started to get the place right and get dignity for the members. It was, you know, a terrible place at the time.

SA: The wharves were at that point?

IH: M'mm.

SA: And who was president?

IH: 'Dutchy' Young and Tom Nelson was the secretary – oh, Jim Young, I shouldn't call him Dutchy Young – Jim Young and Tom Nelson was the secretary and then we had vigilance officers that did the jobs, visited the jobs all the time – no mobile phones in those days.

SA: So what were the wharves like back in the 1950s?

IH: Very, very rough.

SA: Can you just give me a description of them?

9.54 IH: Well, you know, we'd see – I'd look straight out the window over to the wharf in Darling Harbour and there'd be these old men with big –

I'll have to ask Ted [Heidtman, husband] what they were – that they put cargo on, you know, and they'd wheel it over these wooden wharves; it was terrible, terrible conditions they were.

SA: What, really heavy?

IH: M'mm. And they had no amenity rooms, they had no first aid, although the day I started work they won the right to have first aid on every job and that was the 19th of October 1950, always remember it because there was great excitement about it, you know, so they had these members trained to be first aid attendants; up till then they had nothing.

SA: So I imagine it would be a pretty dangerous place to work.

IH: Oh, it was, it was dangerous. It's nearly as dangerous now, though, with all these containers and the speed that goes on; I was petrified the last time I walked on a wharf.

SA: So what was it like for you being a woman working with all those men?

IH: Well, I never – everyone says about wharfies and their language and they're boozers and all this sort of thing – I never heard any language in that office when I was working there. I wouldn't say that today; I've been in there and I said to the girls "I wouldn't put up with that for one minute what you girls are putting up with"; you know, they're completely changed, the officials, they just can't say anything without swearing. I said "Get them a thesaurus".

SA: O.K, so you ran a pretty tight office.

IH: M'mm.

12.01 **SA: Did you put in those rules about people not being able to swear and use bad language in the office?**

IH: Oh, we didn't put it in as a rule, but we didn't have to in those days but I think they set up a swear jar here since – well, since I've left anyway but I couldn't put up with it, not that I had to.

SA: O.K, so you're saying that the conditions were pretty bad for the workers and that on the wharves.

IH: Oh yes, yes.

SA: And how busy were the wharves back then?

IH: Oh, they were very busy. See, we had a membership in Sydney of – when I started there there was eight thousand, nine hundred on the

Sydney waterfront when I started there and I think there's only about two and a half or three thousand now right throughout the country.

SA: Gosh, and that's - - -

IH: Containerisation.

SA: So that all changed when the containerisation came in?

IH: M'mm.

SA: Did you enjoy it?

IH: Oh, yes, particularly when the police raided us in 1951.

SA: Tell me about that.

IH: Because we were sending money to New Zealand, they were on strike. Anyway, this morning we didn't have any amenities there, the girls, you know, you just had your desk, and the police arrived and they went through everything. Anyway, there was a chap on his pushbike – he came from Balmain, Bossy Williams – and they said to him, you know, "Get on your bike and 'round the jobs".

14.04 Well, before the police knew where they were they were surrounded and they came down the road singing "We'll hang Bob Menzies from a sour apple tree" and while they were sort of going through the office they set up the microphones outside so everybody could hear what was going on and they had a meeting outside and they were surrounded, the police; they didn't feel so smug when they were leaving.

SA: And what was the strike?

IH: Well, what we were doing, we were sending money to the New Zealand wharfies who were on strike and the government brought in legislation against that but, you know, sort of even the Commonwealth Bank rang and said "Don't worry, just keep going as you're going and any money we have to provide for you, we will"; with all the suppliers that we dealt with they were very good too.

SA: So you had a lot of support?

IH: Oh, yes, yes, they did have a lot of support in that one, yes.

SA: It must have kept you very busy because they're a pretty militant lot.

IH: Oh, yes, they kept you busy all right.

SA: Can you remember any other events that were sort of pretty outstanding?

IH: Well, we used to do claims. If someone fell in the harbour, you know, they always fell in in their Fletcher Jones' trousers, their hundreds of dollars worth of tea – that used to be very funny but anyway that was just some of the funny things that went on there. But, no, the police, they were disgraceful.

16.05 **SA: Did you have a lot of intimidation as a union?**

IH: Yes, yes, yes.

SA: And scrutiny, I would imagine.

IH: Oh, yes, yes. Some of the people have got their records from, you know, after the thirty year business you can apply for them and there's photos of people coming in and out of the union rooms and, you know, we were all on surveillance.

SA: Were you worried about that?

IH: No, never really worried me. I knew that the blokes that we were working with were very good and they'd look after us. There were, I think, four girls in the office at that time.

SA: And then you were an office manager?

IH: I became office manager after that because the woman who was in charge of the office then, she gave the keys to the police to the safe and things like that, so she didn't last very long after that.

SA: Right. And so what were the significant changes that you saw on the waterfront over the years that you were working there – because you worked forty six years, wasn't it?

IH: M'mm.

SA: Yes.

IH: Oh, big changes, like I don't know where to start. It was just sort of they went for every condition they could get, you know, for the members and the members supported them so, you know, consciously about it – that's why they had so many victories, I think, because of the unity of the members themselves.

SA: Well, it's certainly broken down now but it was a very strong union back then in those days.

IH: Yes, oh yes.

SA: How did that happen that there was such solidarity?

17.58 IH: Well, once they got rid of the bull system that meant that all of them were equal, there was no sort of – like, they used to pick up their favourites and then throw the cards out to anybody else and they'd all scramble for a card to get a job. Well, when they got rid of the – that was called the bull system - - -

SA: The bull system.

IH: - - - and then they got the gang system where the gangs were set up. I think they started off as fifteen men and then they went down to thirteen and then down to eleven as the technology, you know, improved but they were very good as gangs because they looked after one another, you know, and they were really very solid, yes.

SA: So were there permanent workers or they just had to kind of apply to do the work – I mean because they weren't employed full time, were they?

IH: No, not in the early days. What they did, they got a – if they were in the union and they went into the pick-up centre to get work and they didn't get work they got what they called "attendance money", so - but they were all members of the union.

SA: Was there a very strong socialist/communist sort of thread within the union?

IH: Yes, I would say so. Jim Healy was the leader who unfortunately died in '61, Tom Nelson, Matt Munroe, Stan Moran, they were all officials of the Sydney branch and they were communists.

SA: So, were they communists before they were involved with the union or was that just - - -

20.06 IH: No, they were communists.

SA: Yes.

IH: Yes. So they had a Party branch on the waterfront in 1930 and they came from the ranks of that Party branch.

SA: And many of the workers, were they communists as well?

IH: No, not really, no, no. It was interesting because you'd see the vote that Jim Healey would get in the union or he'd be unopposed, you know, and then when they go and stand in a federal election as a communist hardly any votes at all.

SA: So it wasn't a problem for the workers - - -

IH: No.

SA: - - - having such strong, sort of communist leanings?

IH: No, no, no, no.

SA: I guess they were so successful in what they were - - -

IH: Doing, yes.

SA: - - - doing.

IH: Yes.

SA: Yes, O.K. Now, you actually joined the Communist Party, I believe.

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: When did you join the Communist Party?

IH: I joined when I was eighteen, which was the age you could join it and my mum nominated me and Tom Nelson seconded it and I've been in there since I was eighteen and I'm still active in the Party branch.

SA: Gosh, that's quite amazing.

IH: M'mm.

SA: So your mum was a communist as well?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: Right.

IH: Yes. My sister and I used to go to the Sunday school up here on the corner and one Sunday, because I was two years younger than Margaret, they said that communists were termites. Well, she grabbed my arm and we flew out of the place and came home and we told mum what had been said. Anyway, they came down on the following Monday. Well, we come home from school - - -

22.03 **SA: Who came down, the church?**

IH: Church, yes. And, oh, they said they were terribly sorry and all the rest of it and Margaret just said "Well, we're not going back anyway", so we never went back to Sunday school after that. Yes … termites.

SA: So, were they aware that you - - -

IH: I don't know, I don't think so, I don't think so. It's a wonder they didn't know because we used to always have election paraphernalia out on the front when Stan was standing, so I suppose they would have known, yes.

SA: So what was it like growing up as a child with a mother who was a communist in a time when communism - - -

IH: Oh, yes, yes.

SA: - - - wasn't very favourable?

IH: Oh, yes, we went through all the business of burying books in the back yard and putting Lenin's plaque that my cousin won in a race in the toilet cistern because, you know, they were going to raid houses in those days.

SA: And is it post war or pre war that this was going on?

IH: Post war.

SA: Post war.

IH: Yes.

SA: So you used to have big meetings in the house, Ina?

IH: Oh, yes, and we used to have Party schools here and we used to go to Minto for party schools and Mum used to cook for them.

SA: What's a Party school?

IH: A CPA [Communist Party of Australia] school.

SA: Oh.

IH: Yes. Mum used to cook for those and we'd be away for a week.

SA: And then going to learn about communism?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: Wow.

IH: Yes.

SA: So what strand of communism did you grow up sort of being aligned to.

IH: Well, they tell me I was a Stalinist.

24.01 **SA: Your Mum was a Stalinist?**

IH: Oh, not as bad as me, I don't think. She was a lot more gentle than me, I think.

SA: So, in what way were you kind of not gentle?

IH: Oh, I think I was influenced by the people that I worked with more than I was influenced by the family, you know.

SA: I see. So you've kind of had a layering - - -

IH: Yes.

SA: - - - that you growing up with your mother and then of course at the union as well.

IH: Yes.

SA: So they were strong Stalinists at the union, then?

IH: Oh, I think so, yes.

SA: And so when you were a child, growing up, having a mum who was a fairly active communist, did you get - - -

IH: She was a very active unionist too, with the Miscellaneous Workers Union. She told me they used to have what they called a "Party fraction" in the doorway of Anthony Horderns, that's where they used to meet; before they'd go to a meeting of the members the Party group met in the doorway.

SA: In the doorway.

IH: Yes.

SA: So you must have had a very active household here then when you were growing up?

IH: Oh, we did have, yes, all the election campaigns were run from here and at that time we also had Prescott's Hall and we'd - - -

SA: Where's that?

IH: It's just up between this street and Wise Street and, oh, when they got that hall it was covered in chewing gum and God knows what, you

know, and Mum went up and she was a cleaner and cleaned it up but they had it for quite a good few years actually, yes, yes.

26.07 **SA: So your mother ran a branch of the Communist Party from here?**

IH: No, not a branch, no. There was a Balmain branch of the Party but it met elsewhere that she used to go to; it used to meet down at Betty ******'s house, if I can remember properly, I think it was, yes.

SA: Did you have much contact with the main office in the city?

IH: At the Party office?

SA: M'mm.

IH: Yes, through Mum because she used to clean there too; when they went into Marx House she become the cleaner there, left the other job that she had and went there to do office cleaning. Someone said to me one day "Oh, someone was only an office cleaner". Well, did I let fly. I said "They've got their skills the same as anybody. Don't take it for granted".

SA: So you joined the Party when you were - - -

IH: Eighteen.

SA: - - - eighteen and what kind of involvement did you have with the Party over the years?

IH: I've always been active in the Party branch, any of the campaigns that we had on.

SA: So what year was that if you were eighteen?

IH: Eighteen – God, what year? 1954, would it be, because I got married when I was eighteen.

SA: Because that was very active and there were lots of things going, issues happening within the - - -

IH: And the Petrov thing that was going on.

SA: Yes, can you tell me about what was going on at that time?

27.59 IH: Well, I can't really recollect much about the Petrovs but I know that we had on the waterfront some of them got arrested at a picket and they had to appear in court – Harry [Black] was one of them – over this business and actually one of the Party members was a policeman, Rex Cann, so we didn't find this out about him and every branch meeting we went to he was critical of us because we weren't

doing enough, this, that and the next thing, you know. And he come to the meeting and he said he was moving to the Willoughby branch of the Party everybody clapped; no Willoughby branch in the Communist Party at all. So to the Police Association rang us at the office, at the union office, and they said they were concerned that this bloke had been gazetted into a higher position before people that were due for promotion and that's how we found out about him.

SA: So he was a bit of a spy.

IH: He was, yes, yes.

SA: And that was around the '50s?

IH: Yes. We never did enough, you know, he was on our back the whole time. We were all so happy he was going to Willoughby.

SA: And then you found out he was a policeman, a police officer.

IH: The Police Association rang to ask about him.

SA: And what other things were happening around that time?

IH: Well, that was when the office was raided in 1951. In 1954 we had the Hursey dispute.

SA: The Hursey?

30.00 IH: Dispute, yes.

SA: All right.

IH: That was over at Tasmania about people refusing to pay – I'm not sure if it was levies or it was something that they refused to pay, yes.

SA: For housing?

IH: No.

SA: No.

IH: No. It was a levy put on by the union.

SA: I see.

IH: It could have been for the 1951, you know, New Zealand dispute but we had that and that was pretty bad and then we had the big dispute in 1954 and it happened that we knew about what was going to happen because one of our Party girls worked in the office for Dutch Shipping Line and this thing comes out about, oh, what they were

going to do to the Waterside Workers Federation; she took a copy of it and naturally she got the sack.

SA: So tell me what it was.

IH: Well, they were going to break the union up; that was their idea. They've tried that a few times; that one lately where they, you know, took the dogs in and things like that [reference to waterfront dispute of 1998]. But the 1954 one, they were really ready for, you know, the action. They had all committees set up and everything just to move straight in.

SA: Because they were aware of it before?

IH: Mm, mm.

SA: Yes.

IH: Yes, and they certainly did a good job, particularly in the country areas. You know, there wasn't sort of the extent of television in those days and they'd sent out groups into different areas of the country to explain the case of the union and they had a very, very big campaign.

SA: So this was the Communist Party that organised the campaign together with the union?

IH: Yes. Well, it wasn't seen in that way: it was the Party people who were meeting would take the things back to the union and they'd be accepted and, yes, it was a very interesting time then.

32.13 **SA: Because the membership was quite strong in those early years.**

IH: Oh, yes, yes, yes, there was a big membership. As I said, eight thousand nine hundred when I started in Sydney and there's only about three and a half thousand now, I think, throughout Australia.

SA: And what about in the Party, what was the membership like there?

IH: Well, it was fairly big. We had four Party branches on the waterfront; we had four Party branches, a district committee – no, a section committee and the district committee, so it was pretty strong.

SA: And then also moving into the '60s and '70s within the Party there was a split, I believe.

IH: Oh, yes, yes.

SA: But that was happening a bit earlier too.

IH: Yes.

SA: Can you recall?

IH: I can recall the split because – I can't remember whether we got expelled or we left then from the Party. Harry [Black] would have known but I know we were outside the Party and then we formed the Socialist Party and then when the Communist Party more or less drifted away we then took the name again of the Communist Party.

SA: So what were the issues, can you remember?

34.03 IH: Well, there were quite a few, actually. Oh, gee. Well, basically our people thought that they were moving away from the philosophy of Marxism - that was basically one of the things - and some of the people who were on the central committee, they behaved pretty badly. Our branch was going to be expelled, that's right, we were going to be expelled - I'm just trying to think – oh, then and that's when we formed the Socialist Party and we had our headquarters in Sussex Street. I think the bloke that owns that hotel, the one that's well known or, well, where whatshername met the prince and she's married and overseas now.

SA: Princess Mary?

IH: Yes, I can't think. Oh, it was Royal Oak Hotel - - -

SA: I see.

IH: - - - and we were right next door to the Royal Oak but now the hotel has taken over all that area, so they've taken over the Communist Party Headquarters too – I don't think they know that.

SA: So it must have been – well, I guess it's a question – what was it like during that split? Was it a pretty terrible time?

35.49 IH: Pretty, yes, it was, it was, because, you know, friends that you'd had for years and things like that. In our Party branch, I mean I used to meet this friend of mine every week before we went to our Party meeting and we'd go and have a drink first; she went one way and I went the other way. So, you know, it did, it caused a lot of problems but anyway.

SA: So you started the Socialist Party and then eventually came back?

IH: Back.

SA: Back again, yes.

IH: Yes.

SA: Yes. So you must have lived and breathed union and - - -

IH: Party.

SA: - - - Party.

IH: Yes.

SA: And were there any other interests or that would have just kept me busy all the time?

IH: It kept me busy all the time. We got married when I was eighteen.

SA: Tom? Tom was your husband?

IH: Ted.

SA: Ted, sorry.

IH: Yes, we've been married fifty eight years, I think, coming up.

SA: So, did you meet him at the Party as well?

IH: At the corner.

SA: At the corner.

IH: He's not Party inclined.

SA: He's not?

IH: No. We agree to differ.

SA: That would have been interesting - - -

IH: Yes.

SA: - - - given your commitment and activism.

IH: Yes, oh, yes, but anyway we've made it; I don't ask him how he votes and he doesn't ask me how I vote.

SA: Did you continue the tradition of having Party meetings at your house?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: Yes.

IH: M'mm. And we used to have Party classes of a Saturday afternoon. I think they mainly come for Mum's cooking than for the party school.

SA: What was the format of those Party schools?

37.53 IH: Oh, we just all sat in the loungeroom in there and we had our tutor and we'd have projects to do from one week to the other, you know, and we'd have to come back with some content about what we felt about what we've been reading – it was very interesting, yes.

SA: So were there mainly adults?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: And they were organised through the Communist - - -

IH: Party.

SA: - - - through the Communist Party?

IH: The schools, yes, yes. Ted had to drive me up to Minto because we had a Party school up there and I said "You'd better drive me up". I said "They're having trouble with the record player" and I said "They like to have music at dinnertime", see. So, we'd go up – the only thing they'd done was they hadn't plugged it in and he said "Good luck with your school" .

SA: So what kinds of things were they lecturing on at the school?

IH: Well, basically putting the practice of Marxism into effect and how you would apply it here, you know. It was always interesting and, yes, and we'd have to take part in debates which was good – didn't always agree with one another but anyway.

SA: So that was the idea of that was so that you would become even more active and vocal about it?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: Was that the reason?

IH: Yes.

SA: Right, O.K, yes. Did you grow up believing in any particular sort of religion?

40.07 IH: No, no. No, I couldn't say I did. I think Margaret and I both thought that Mum was sorely done by, losing two boys and Dad and, you know, religion, that sort of thing, we used to go to Sunday school

because we used to go to picnics but that'd be the only reason and then, as I said, when they were called termites that ended that for us.

SA: So would you have been atheist?

IH: Yes.

SA: Yes.

IH: Definitely.

SA: And we were talking before to Ina about your longstanding friendship with Harry Black.

IH: Yes.

SA: Yes.

IH: I think I've known Harry since he joined the waterfront. I started there in 1950 and we used to fill in the forms for the members coming through and of course he started very early on in taking active participation in the cultural activities because we had a film group and we used to have films on in the lunch hour 'cause it was an hour lunch. And we had the famous dance drama group and they came down there and everybody had to be in the room by twelve o'clock, all the blinds were pulled and the doors were shut, they'd put on their performance and the next thing one blind goes up and one of the members goes out of it. Oh, dear; I think I felt like following him actually.

42.05 But we did have some good entertainment down there and exhibitions and Harry was instrumental in those activities.

SA: So Harry really got those - - -

IH: Yes.

SA: - - - within the union up and running?

IH: Mm, mm.

SA: And why was that important for the union to be doing that kind of - - -

IH: Well, I think it came through the Party, actually, more or less talking about the Cultural Revolution, so they had a fairly big hall there, the lunch hours were an hour long, we'd have ushers showing people to their seats 'cause we had a film group who showed the films and then we had a children's dance group.

SA: So they were all kids of the waterside workers?

IH: Mm, mm. They used to be there in the hall there every Saturday, yes.

SA: That's fantastic.

IH: Yes.

SA: What other things did you do. You had quite a lot of artistic kind of expression with the drawing.

IH: Yes. Well, they did the mural, yes.

SA: Tell me about that.

IH: The mural, well it was started and actually it had almost been completed and I went down one morning to the canteen – we had a canteen – and it was done on a hall that went like that (demonstrates visually) you know, like fireplaces and they had to get it off and it was a marvellous job how they got that off and moved it.

SA: How did they get it off?

43.49 IH: Oh, I don't – it was on the actual wall, you know. And anyway I went down one morning to the canteen and we had painters coming in and the first thing - they'd set up the frame for the painting - they were going to paint it out. And I run upstairs and Tom Nelson come down and he said "What are you doing?" "Oh, we're starting the painting". Well, you don't start there", it would've been gone.

SA: If you hadn't have been going down to have a cup of tea?

IH: Yes, it was – oh, I couldn't believe it myself that anyone would do it. But we had a good relationship with Rod Shaw – I don't know if you've ever heard of him.

SA: No.

IH: He had a printing business in Sussex Street but he was also an artist and he helped like do the layout of the mural and then the people who were keen on artwork in the union, they got into it, you know, under his guidance. So they took it off the wall and we took it over to the other building that they bought and then when we had to sell that building they said "That's it, it's going to the Maritime Museum" but they've never put it up; they've got one panel of it put up. They said the air conditioning wasn't right for it and, you know, we campaigned a long time with them but I don't think anything's been done about it since I've left.

SA: That's a pity.

IH: Yes, it was beautiful, a beautiful mural.

SA: What other things did you do over at the union?

45.52 IH: Oh. Well, I told you we got all the minute books out and we did the history of the branch in chart form, so if anyone wanted to know anything they just went and looked up the chart, which was very interesting. Of course, when the blokes on the job found out they'd be ringing in, saying, "What year did such and such happen?" you know, so they've still got those.

SA: So knowing the history, is that important?

IH: I think so.

SA: Yes. Why do you think that that is?

IH: Well, I'll just give you an example. When I was working there and there'd be a dispute or something the members would automatically support whatever the union wanted to do, you know. But after that, after I left and I heard it, they were talking about "Oh, no, we can't go on strike, we've got a mortgage", you know, and this sort of thing. Well, that's understandable but they'd be going on strike for better conditions for them but that's like the change it took.

SA: So knowing the history of the struggle to get to where they are today - - -

IH: Oh, yes, yes.

SA: - - - that can make a difference?

IH: Yes.

SA: You must have seen a lot of changes over that time, though, because - - -

IH: Mm.

SA: - - - there was all that, you know, the containerisation.

IH: Oh, yes.

SA: What was that like?

IH: Oh, that was dreadful. I mean, as I said, we went from eight thousand nine hundred in Sydney alone down to about three and a half thousand throughout Australia.

SA: What was the atmosphere like on the wharves?

IH: Well, it wasn't good. You know, I mean the whole scene on the waterfront changed completely, you know, with great big containers everywhere and, you know, they talked about the deaths prior but there were a lot of deaths with containers too and once you got hit with one of those you didn't get up again.

48.10 **SA: Lots of people were getting hit?**

IH: Yep, yes.

SA: So was that '70s, 1970s?

IH: The '70s.

SA: Or the '80s?

IH: I think it was the late '70s sometime I think it was.

SA: And when did you leave?

IH: 1996 and I was going back for six weeks while one of the girls went overseas; it was nine months I was there.

SA: They couldn't do without you.

IH: Well, she didn't come back, she stayed; her mother was very crook. So I just every week kept saying "Oh, I've got to stay another week, I've got to stay another week" and then the cat come out of the bag one night we were at a wake. I'm talking about you [husband, Ted]. We were at this wake and it came out that I was going to be there for that length of time; that's how Ted found out.

TH: Oh, my God.

SA: You weren't so happy about that, Ted?

TH: No, not really.

SA: So what age would you have been at that point?

IH: Oh, gee. It wouldn't have been that many years after I'd left, would it?

TH: What, that you went back?

IH: Mm.

TH: No, I don't suppose so.

IH: It was when ****** went overseas, wasn't it?

TH: Yes, her mother got sick - - -

IH: Yes.

TH: - - - and she took twelve months off.

IH: Yes.

SA: So you officially retired then?

IH: Yes, yes.

SA: Right. Was that a hard point in your - - -

50.00 IH: What, going back?

SA: No, no, no, retiring, making that decision to retire.

IH: Yes, yes. Ted fell into retirement easy; I really had a battle with it.

SA: So why was that, Ina?

IH: Oh, I just sort of didn't like being home all the time, you know, and the first thing Ted said to me of course is "Well, we can get rid of one of the cars now". The first thing you said to me when I retired was "We can get rid of one of the cars now".

TH: Well, yes. Well, you don't need two, do you?

IH: Well, I've got it.

SA: You've still got your car?

IH: ------

TH: ------

SA: You definitely are a strong woman, Ina, you definitely are.

IH: ------

SA: It's in your genes, by the sounds of it.

IH: Yes, I take after my mother.

TH: And she was backed up with my two sisters too about the car.

SA: I see, so she had a bit of backup?

TH: Yes.

IH: That's the only time they've backed me up though, I might add.

TH: ------

SA: So what was it like on retirement for you?

IH: I found it very hard, very hard, but that's when we bought the little place up the coast, wasn't it, when I retired?

TH: Mm.

IH: So we go up there every second weekend, so.

SA: Right. But you were still involved with the Party, though.

IH: Oh, yes, I still am, yep.

SA: So did you spend more time like on Party issues when you had a bit more time?

IH: Yes, I think I did. We used to go down Balmain, selling the paper and taking up petitions and things like that.

SA: And what issues were going on around the '90s then, can you remember?

52.06 IH: That's a hard one. I can't remember what I was doing now, I can remember what I was doing in the '50s.

TH: ------

SA: At least you've got a good excuse. I'm a bit like that myself and I don't actually have an excuse for that at the moment.

IH: Mm.

SA: Yes, so we were kind of touching on Harry and his involvement with all the cultural activities at the union.

IH: Yes.

SA: But he was also a very strong – I mean, he was obviously strong in the union but also a very strong Party man as well.

IH: Oh, yes, yes, yes, he was. Yes, he was the secretary of our Party branch from when we first joined the Party and up until just recently

since he's been, you know, more or less sick, so we've got another secretary now. Oh, God, don't quote me.

SA: And you have a very longstanding friendship with Harry.

IH: Yes, yes, yes, for over sixty years.

SA: And do you want to say what's happened to him over the last little while or - - -

IH: No, it's too upsetting, really, yes.

SA: Yes. Ina just got news this morning that Harry has to be taken to hospital; he's declining in his health, so.

IH: Yes.

SA: Yes.

53.47 IH: He's been in a retirement village they call them but he's gone beyond their level that they can look after him. So they said that he's going to hospital today but where he'll go from there I don't know - palliative care, I suppose, which won't be too pleasant.

SA: And it seems like, you know, just like the very strong friendship that was forged between you and Harry that it was that the union and the Party are - - -

IH: Yes, Party.

SA: - - - very family.

IH: Yes.

SA: It sounds like it was very much of a family.

IH: Oh yes, yes. Yes, we had some very good people in our Party branch.

SA: And did you have like, you know, a big social life within the union?

IH: Oh, yes, in the union we did and - - -

SA: And in the Party?

IH: - - - in the Party too but of course party members are getting older and it's like everything now: they're not building, the Labor Party's not building or things like that and I just think it's a lack of interest by young people now.

SA: So what do you think the challenges are then for both the union and the Party? I mean, what do you think their big challenges are for the future?

IH: Well, trying to build them, that's the main thing, because people just don't have the time or the inclination to take on sort of responsibilities like you used to do. I mean, if you joined something you knew you had to participate in it but even now we find that the newer ones that are coming into the Party don't participate. Like, just an example is once a month the Party branch meets and every fortnight the executive meets but they never sort of set aside those night, you know, and say "Well, look, I'm not available" like the old officials used to do; Wednesday night was Party night but these ones now, they don't do that, they just don't do it.

56.17 **SA: So it's also the organisers that have - - -**

IH: Mm.

SA: Right.

IH: Yes.

SA: I'm just wondering whether there's any other things that I've missed out on talking to you about because, I mean obviously you've had a tremendous long, long history in the union and also with the Party.

IH: Party, yes.

SA: Yes.

IH: And my retirement [event] only went from two o'clock in the day till midnight.

SA: Really?

IH: Yes.

SA: Tell me about your [retirement] party.

IH: Well, we had met – it started at two o'clock actually and oh, it was packed and we had speeches and presentations and so forth. There was a lot of tears and then we adjourned upstairs to the big hall and they'd had bottles of wine done with my name on them and, you know "1950 to 1996" or something and a beautiful big cake and it went on till twelve o'clock at night.

SA: That's lovely.

IH: Yes.

SA: A fitting farewell, do you think?

IH: Yes.

SA: So it sounds like you actually felt like you could have continued and you did continue for another nine months later on.

57.53 IH: Yes, but I could have continued but, see, Ted had taken redundancy two years before and he was getting a bit peeved with me still going to work but I didn't want to retire.

SA: And do you still keep in contact with the union?

IH: Yep.

SA: Yes, still mates, still.

IH: Oh, yes, I still go in usually of a Wednesday afternoon; before I go to the Party meeting I go in and see them, yes.

SA: So you're still going the Party meeting on Wednesdays as well?

IH: Yes, yes. Yes, I'm the assistant secretary treasurer of the Party branch; have been for about fifty years.

SA: Any other roles that you've had over the years?

IH: I was on the central committee of the Party for some years but I thought I was getting too old for that, so I didn't stand at the congress and there were another couple that didn't stand either – I think Harry was one of them too, Harry and I and, oh, one of the secretaries of the union, Bob Bolger, we all stood down at the congress – I can't think what year it was now.

SA: O.K. Well, look, I think that's a very great place to end and you're talking about your retirement party and what a wonderful sendoff you had.

IH: Oh, it was, it was great.

SA: Yes. So thanks for your time today, Ina.

IH: That's all right.

SA: That was a lovely interview, thank you.

IH: I've enjoyed it too; it brings back a lot of memories.

SA: Yes.

Interview ends