



## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### BELIEF

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**Interviewee:** Norma and John Blackwood

**Interviewer:** Sue Andersen

**Place:** Rudolf Steiner House, Sussex St, Sydney

**Date:** 2 May 2011

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## TRANSCRIPT

0.00    **SA:**    This is Sue Anderson interviewing Norma Blackwood and John Blackwood at the Rudolf Steiner House in Sydney on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2011 for the City of Sydney's Oral History Project, Belief.

Now, thank you both for doing the interview. Thanks for joining us, John. I wasn't expecting to have two people but you're more than welcome.

**JB:**    Thank you.

**SA:**    Yes, so maybe, Norma, if we could start with you by you saying your full name and when you were born.

**NB:**    Both names. Norma \*\*\*\*\* Blackwood and I was born in 1941 in Sydney.

**SA: Right, O.K. And John?**

JB: John Blackwood or \*\*\*\*\* Blackwood, born in England in 1940.

**SA: Right, O.K. So, Norma, maybe we could start with you by you talking about some of your early history, growing up. You said you were from Sydney but whereabouts from Sydney?**

NB: I grew up in Rozelle and I went to Rozelle Primary School and then to Sydney Girls' High School as a child, yes. I left school at fifteen because my parents split up and I felt that I needed to get a job to support my mother.

**SA: Right, so you went straight into work?**

NB: Well, I'd got a bursary to do a business course and then went to work as a secretary, yes, in an accountant's office.

**SA: Like, with ..... ..**

NB: In an accountant's office, yes, and I did secretarial work but I also did a little bit of accounting, simple accounting things as well there.

**SA: Right. So because this project, oral history, is about belief, so can you talk to me about some of your early – did you come from a very Christian upbringing or religious upbringing?**

2.01 NB: Well, my mother was Catholic but when it was time for me to go to school she had twins and she couldn't take me to the Catholic school so I went up to the local public school with neighbours' children. So I was educated in a public school and so I didn't really form – although I went through the usual Catholic things of confirmation – what's first?

**SA: I think it's confirmation, isn't it?**

**NB:** No, communion, communion and then confirmation, first Holy Communion and confirmation. I didn't really attach myself to the Catholic church all that much, although when I was about fourteen I had this – as often people around that age have, I think – I had this sort of longing for something, I suppose religious, spiritual, something like that, and so I did start going to church for a while. And then again it wasn't till I was about twenty one and I was travelling in Europe that I started to feel another – I suppose went into some of those incredible cathedrals in Europe and started to feel another sense of wanting to have a spiritual experience and I went to various masses and it never quite was what I expected, yep. And then I think it was at the time I still was following the Catholic religion to a certain extent and then it was the time when the Pope declared – I think it was from – I'll make it up – from July it wouldn't be a sin any more to eat meat on Fridays and I thought "Hang on. You know, it either is or it isn't, but from July?" you know, yes. And by that stage I had met John who I went to see a film called 'The Cardinal', I think, and there was a huge moral question in it for me and I spoke to John about it and he introduced me to one of Steiner's books, called 'The Philosophy of Freedom' and that's when I became interested in Rudolf Steiner's work.

4.14 **SA: Right. And you were how old?**

**NB:** About twenty three, maybe.

**JB:** Twenty four, twenty five?

**NB:** Twenty two, twenty three.

**JB:** Twenty three?

**NB:** Twenty two, twenty three, twenty three, maybe. By the time I came back from Europe I was still only – yes.

**SA: So you met while you were in Europe?**

NB: Twenty two.

JB: No, no.

NB: No, no, we met here.

**SA: Right.**

NB: Yes, after I came back, yes.

JB: Yes, I missed her over there.

**SA: So, John, what about – I'll come back to that in a minute – but, John, what about you?**

JB: My parents were pretty much free thinkers, very intelligent, very poor. Well, not too poor but not very well off and they were very literary and they had a considerable interest in nature, which I've always valued. And I did an apprenticeship in engineering which finished when I was about twenty one and stayed with that company, Smith's Aviation Instruments at the time, until I wondered what the heck I was doing and somebody suggested "Why don't you go to Australia", so I did.

**SA: O.K.**

JB: And it cost me ten pounds.

**SA: So what about your spiritual beliefs?**

JB: Well, I would put myself as a questioner. I was interested in knowing and I didn't buy into any of the current traditional religions in any way, shape or form; parents didn't push us in any direction – I've always valued that too –

and the only connection, I'm fond of saying, was that we were sent occasionally to the Sunday school in a little village called Upham in the south of England and I was one of those that literally pinched apples from the rectory garden. We did. And that was about the only thing I remember.

6.17     **SA:     So you had come to Steiner before Norma?**

NB:     Oh, fractionally, yes, yes. I met somebody in England who had an amazing, what he called occult, library and I'm not convinced it was all his now. It was a huge room, about as big as this entire thing – half of it anyway – and he pointed out a book by Steiner actually. So it was also 'Knowledge of the Higher Worlds', one of the ones that interested Norma in the early days and I remember it clearly, just looking at it, but that was my first contact so to speak. And it was on the boat – I came by boat here – on the boat on the way over that I got vaguely interested in other things like a hint of Gurdjieff a hint of Uspensky, different sort of explorative things, but I didn't go too far with any of those and in Sydney I connected with the Theosophical Society and that seemed to be a group of people on the hunt, so to speak, looking for things and I joined what they called at the time the YTs, the Young Theosophists, for a while.

**SA:     The White - - -**

JB:     YTs, the Young Theosophists. And I joined – in the end I must have been pretty interested because I joined one of their inner lodges called the Isis Lodge for a little while and valued that experience too. And somehow or other – I can't remember – I found this anthroposophy thing; I just can't remember the fine detail of that, no.

**SA:     So what attracted you to theosophy, what was it about theosophy that really sort of sparked your interest?**

8.03     JB:     I suppose it was looking at attempting to answer questions, had a picture. You know, I didn't see much of a picture out there in the world of science thing, it didn't speak much to me, although I value the – because I worked in engineering I knew well enough that part of the world could be spoken about in that way but it didn't necessarily speak to me as a person, you know, and I suppose the theosophical thing ended up not making as much sense as the anthroposophical thing and what Steiner had to say. Because he was saying, as I understood it, what he was saying was out of his

perception, his actual knowledge, wasn't guesswork, wasn't speculation, wasn't belief, and that interested me.

**SA: It wasn't belief?**

JB: No. He was saying it wasn't belief, he knew what he was talking about, end of story. He perceived various things, actually perceived the things he spoke about. That's what he was telling us, that's what I believed.

**SA: O.K.**

JB: It's a big point, actually, and not often enough made, I think, that he was [break to close door] - where was I?

**SA: Yes. So you were saying that was a big point, it was that he wasn't making up - - -**

JB: Well, it is. To me, just like you can see that microphone and I can see it too, my conviction was that Steiner was able to see and experience and participate in spiritual worlds as real as our physical world and he was able to do that with the physical world as well, the two for him were conjoint, not separate.

**SA: So not based on science?**

10.01 JB: Well, not based on physical science, no, because there's something else we call "spiritual science" of which ordinary science is a subset, a very small one too.

**SA: O.K, well that's - - -**

JB: Makes you think, doesn't it?

**SA: Yes.**

**NB:** So, really, his path is scientific in the sense that – I don't know whether I'll find the right word – you're better at words – in the sense that there's a definite process, a definite – yes, the first thing is to really develop one's own thinking so that one doesn't lose touch with reality, one doesn't lose touch with the physical world but one can use that thinking to see further. So that's why he calls it spiritual science because it's based on a scientific method in a certain sense, yes.

**JB:** For instance, we all know we've got physical senses up to a certain level but the notion could also be that there are spiritual senses, there are soul senses, levels of senses which we can develop which aren't given naturally and have to depend upon our own choice to do so. There's a tradition of this in the eastern religions and so on of chakras, so-called, which as I understand it can be developed by various practices of which many old traditions know and knew and used and which modern people can also use if they choose to.

**NB:** I think we all have a certain sense that isn't so much a physical sense, if you like, in that we can sense what's living in a person often, yes, we can go into a room and sense an atmosphere, we can sense a person's sorrow or joy or, yes, all those things that aren't actually completely physical, they're really on, as John said, a soul level.

12.12 **JB:** Mediated by the physical - - -

**NB:** Yes, that's right.

**JB:** - - - but not physical.

**NB:** Yes, yes. So, yes, I think that's what's – and I didn't mention before but that was one of the things that interested me also before I went to Europe – I went to Europe when I was twenty one – I went to various WEA courses on philosophy and psychology because that was always something that interested me very much, yes.

**SA: So you at about twenty three and John gave you a book and you were reading Steiner and what Steiner, not believed, but what he knew?**

NB: Well, the Philosophy of Freedom is not even that kind of book is it?

JB: No, it's actually philosophical.

NB: It's a really heavy thinking philosophical book, yes.

JB: To my mind, Steiner's first gift to most of us would have been that book in the sense that he showed a path by which we could all follow that would take us eventually to where he was if we practiced enough the various things and the first stage, as Norma pointed out earlier, is that of thinking, thinking as a spiritual activity – in my view, let's quickly say. I teach maths and I know that mathematics is not dependent upon the physical. It interacts with the physical world but it doesn't depend upon it, it's a world in its own right with its whole body of knowledge. It's a body of knowledge, huge body of knowledge which is developing all the time actually.

**SA: I don't really know what you mean. Could you just talk about that?**

13.56 JB: Well, if you look at some of the theorems and ideas in mathematics they're things that we think through, we have as mental artifacts, not as physical artifacts. They apply to the physical world, it's true, very often anyway, but the reality is, as some people are fond of saying, that mathematics if pursued as it really is, as I see it and as many see it – and I was just looking this up earlier today – that it can predict where people will go in their research. Mathematics is not necessarily developed for the physical but it eventually often finds an application in the physical world. So sometimes people can learn things from mathematics in the first place and then start looking at the physical world; that's what they often do. It's also the reverse, of course: physical world can promote a huge mathematical exploration to understand the laws but it's not one-way traffic and it never was.

**SA: So are you saying that these - - -**



NB: I'll tell you what you're on, you might have him talking for hours but I'll just warn you; this is his pet subject.

**SA: So is this a Steiner kind of – how do you say this word again - - -**

NB: Anthroposophical.

**SA: - - - anthroposophical, anthroposophical idea?**

JB: I don't think it is. I think it's been there since way back but I think that Steiner gave a validity to it and a possibility of exploration that probably wouldn't have occurred without him in that he would have shown – just give you an example – he said “For instance” – and this is in some lectures that are often called the ‘Astronomy Lectures’ – this is a misnomer but anyway – that he said that “If you wanted to learn about the living world you would need to study projective geometry” - or words to that effect – projective geometry which is a mathematical thing, of course.

16.03 And myself and many others have done just that and started to learn quite a lot about the organic world, not just the physical world, the living world. I mean, O.K, so organisms are in the physical but it's another level of the physical world, the organic world, life world, the world of life is another level. And he gave this indication, so quite a number of people have done just that – there's books downstairs on that with the work of people like a man called George Adams, Lawrence Edwards, Nick Thomas.

NB: John Blackwood.

JB: Well, not yet anyway. I've only done two little tiny maths books but I'm working on it, I'm working on it. So this is an avenue which I believe one can get a little closer to the reality of nature. I mean, physicists are using maths all the time, all the time. A man called Vigna [?] said he was always amazed at the effectiveness, the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the physical sciences, an article from 1960. And then another mathematician said he was always amazed at the unreasonableness of the ineffectiveness of mathematics in the biological sciences. Now, that man has died since, I don't know, quite a few years but I personally believe that many people are doing just that, finding mathematics effective in the biological world, right from the time of D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, the naturalist, Scottish naturalist published a famous

book called 'On Growth and Form' – I'm saying this almost automatically – in 1916 and that's a book, quite a famous one actually, which hasn't really been recognised, I think. Well, his work hasn't really been recognised.

18.00 I mean, he's quoted all the time but it hasn't been developed, not particularly well. So in 1916 people were already onto the notion that maths can interface with the biological world, not just the physical or physical force world, yes.

**SA: Right.**

JB: Enough from me. Carry on, Norma.

**SA: It sounds really fascinating. O.K, so we should get back to the Society then - - -**

NB: Right, O.K.

JB: Why not?

**SA: - - - and the beliefs of the Society because I'm sure the mathematics question is a huge area of it.**

JB: I'm sure it is.

**SA: So, Norma, you were interested in philosophy, looking for some kind of something that meant - - -**

NB: Well, as I said to you before, it was quite heavy going and I read about three chapters and gave it back to John but I still, in lots of arguments with him and conversations, I still felt that "This guy's got something, you know, there's something behind it". So I went to the library and I borrowed *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* or *How to know Higher Worlds* it's translated as as well and that was what really spoke to me because it's, I think, got

apart from being a training it also has huge moral content and I think that's what spoke to me, this sort of moral side, although if you read *Philosophy of Freedom* you find that morality is not so easy to define in a certain sense; we have to find the right action for the right moment rather than have a set of rules that we act by all the time but presumably that will then still be moral in a certain sense, you know, so. So that was, yes, that was my introduction, yes.

20.03    **SA:**    **So that's obviously – not obviously but there was a spiritual dimension to that?**

NB:        Yes, yes, yes. And there are exercises which he gives where one can start to sense something more behind what you see. I'm not saying that I'm clairvoyant or I have spiritual vision but I can actually, if I do for instance an exercise – he gives an exercise to look at a blossoming plant and to really think about it and look at it and then try to experience what quality lives there and then look at a dying plant and do the same thing and you start to see that there's something that I couldn't describe in words but that lives there that's not just the physical, yes, there's something else that you start to sense behind that blossoming and dying and then he – yes, I'll leave it there.

**SA:**        **So does that kind of then, does that - - -**

NB:        Is moving over, yep.

**SA:**        **To the spiritual kind of world?**

NB:        Yes, yes, moving over to it but I can't profess to have huge spiritual experiences.

**SA:**        **O.K.**

NB:        So in a sense you have to say, I guess, when you ask about belief that what Steiner says makes sense. Some of it I have to sit on a little shelf there and say "Well, maybe one day I'll understand that better. At the moment I just have to leave it sitting". And one does have a certain belief, I guess, that this man, there's so much come out of his work, of course, there's

education, there's biodynamic agriculture, there's working with children who need special care, there's the arts, there's medicine, you know, all these things that are working in the world today and this year is the hundred and fiftieth – in February was a hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth.

22.04

So in Europe there were lots of articles about him and his work and what's come out of his work in the world today in practical spheres. Yes, so all that's there so you have to have a certain sense that, O.K, this man experienced something, he knew something. I don't experience the same thing yet but I have a confidence that if I work at it I won't necessarily have the same experience but I'll understand a bit more of the world and how I can actually be of more, I suppose, real use in the world, if you like. Yes, because what I also see is that lots of people do things out of well meaning but unless they have a really clear picture of what the human being really is and what the world really is, some of those well-meaning things can actually be destructive on a certain level, yes. I look at children today and the introduction of computers for very little children, young children in schools. I mean, these children learn how to use computers just like that when they're fourteen. Why do they need them in primary school when the child's really living in the will, they're imitating people, they need to move. A young child can't stay still; they have to touch things and experience things. What would they be doing, sitting in front of a computer? Apart from their exercise their whole well-being to me is being damaged by that. Now, the people who introduce them think that they're doing something good and something worthwhile but if you can't understand what the child is, then you don't know what's good for a child, that's what I'm saying and so on with lots of other things in the world too.

24.03

So that's where I'm – yes, I don't know what I was going to say now but, yes, that's enough of that.

**SA:** So with – you know, John, you were saying before that Steiner is very clear about not having beliefs but having more knowing, what would the knowing be, like what does that mean, like what is the principles behind - - -

**NB:** Knowing.

**SA:** - - - knowing, what is it? Like, I'm trying to avoid saying “belief” but what is Steiner about?

NB: Yes, yes, yes.

**SA: Well not necessarily just Steiner but anthropo - - -**

NB: Anthroposophical, anthroposophy, yes.

**SA: - - - anthroposophy, what is that?**

NB: Yes. Well, to my way of thinking it's actually through meditation and through work, actually finding these experiences oneself and not just belief but at the moment you could say that on a certain level we are acting out of belief but out of a belief that's backed up from own experience. So for instance when he talks about the child in the first seven years being an imitator, living very much in the limbs and the will, and in the next seven years living in the feeling life and the way to educate is through imagination and stories and I suppose, if you like, expansion and contraction in the feeling life. Yes, so you tell a story and the child breathes out. You don't let the child breath out too far, they've got to come back in again, so that they're living in that rhythmic life that they're in, in the second seven years of life and in the next seven years they live more into the thinking. So the education, instead of bringing thinking up front will bring just actually having the child imitate and move and work and then the memory is not touched at all in the first seven years in a certain sense and then they start to work into that in next seven years.

26.05

Now, that's something that Steiner gave and that's what he talked about, the child, but when you look at children and with that as a background you can see "Yes, that's really how it is", so it's, yes, on one level you could say it's a belief, on another level one can experience that. When I look at my little grandchildren, you know, and see how they move and work, yes. [break in recording] A thing called Rudolf Steiner College operates out of this building as well, yes. So, yes, so that's what I'm saying, that although it's belief on one level it's also what you actually see with, you know, what you experience with children and it goes for the people who are doing the farming and I mean a lot of farmers who are actually practicing biodynamic agriculture have no idea of what Steiner's general philosophy is, yes. Some of them finally come to ask but many of them don't have any idea; they just use the preparations that have been developed and, yes.

**SA: So what is the principles then? If you could – like I know you’ve kind of said the headings of all of them, so I understand what you're saying about the education but what about the agriculture and the spiritual?**

**NB:** Well, it all is spiritual. I mean, when I talk about the education, that’s coming out of his spiritual knowledge, yes, it’s not something that’s separate in a way. He had a picture of what the child was and what the developing child was and that’s how he developed this educational process. Now, you know, he developed a curriculum. If a teacher just takes that curriculum and gives it to the children it’s a methodology and it’s no longer – they have to be actually starting to work with their own vision of the children themselves and teachers do actually at night – because that’s also something that we work with is sleep, our sleep life – they’ll picture the children and take that with them and something will come to them next morning maybe, that a particular child might need.

28.21 Yes, so it’s not divorced, it’s all one, really, and the same with the biodynamic agriculture, Steiner – well, I don’t know if I can speak for that so much really but he saw the relationship of certain preparations to certain parts of the body or parts of animal organs and he brought those together and – John, you’d probably be better talking about it than I would. Or maybe neither of us should talk about biodynamic agriculture.

**JB:** No, I couldn’t directly.

**NB:** No.

**JB:** But just looking at, say, the whole plant world which is agricultural, at least if you ignore the animals, that plant world is seen as having a connection with a wider sphere than the mere material, has a connection with the whole cosmos for instance, all the planets and the stars and everything, so that a knowledge of plant life needs to include a knowledge of the entire planetary systems and so forth because that affects the way a plant grows. And even in some of our little bit of scientific work there seems to be a developing awareness of that in a way which we can grasp through, believe it or not, geometry. For instance, there seems to be – I’ll just take the example of some of my work – with the oak tree, the oak tree has buds. The buds change, the buds grow.

30.00 They also change their shape, which is quite different from simply getting larger, they actually change their form and this seems to be in a fortnightly cycle, a fortnightly cycle that has to do with the moon but that interrupts another influence which connects a plant. Say traditionally the oak tree is connected with Mars and so one looks for the moon's effect on the Mars rhythm. I mean, there's a whole story here, as you can fully guess. And if this is true then it becomes accessible to us to be able to eventually say what plant might be connected with what part of the cosmos, etcetera, and if we then work back from there and see what part of the cosmos is part of our bodily nature it could eventually be that we will not just have tradition but we will know what sort of plant life will help what part of the body. So there is eventually a potential for a healing knowledge which we don't have at the moment, we just don't have it. We rely on knowing that comfrey is called boneknit which helps the bones to knit but we don't have that as actual knowledge in the sense of a modern science nowadays. Now, my conviction is that eventually we will have that knowledge because we'll know the relationship of that plant to what part of the cosmos and therefore what part of the human body. So the whole thing is knit together but we're only just beginning, I think we've only just begun these whole studies personally and that whereas I can say I know that the oak bud which is about that big (demonstrates visually) pulsates because I've been taking photographs for ten years – and I send them to a friend who tends to look at them sometimes in Scotland.

32.07 He's working with air and he does the same thing and so he sees that this pulsation is there. Then it comes a question of "What is that pulsation and why?" Turns out that it's coincident with the moon and Mars – I'm just using one example. Other people have worked with the sun and the cherry, they've worked with Saturn and the beech, I think it is, and various other plants to see whether there is this correlation and it means as the correlation, it means that when you're looking at a tree you're actually looking at the cosmos at the same time but we don't necessarily see that, most of us anyway – I don't. I don't see it directly, I see it through the ideas that one can sort of have about this and how well that correlates with the evidence, the photographs for instance and the analysis thereof through the geometry that Steiner said we would need to have to look at the plant world and he's dead right, he's dead right.

**SA:** That's fascinating.

**NB:** Yes, just to go back to your question about Steiner's picture – and I guess I would look at the picture of the human being that he gave - and he saw the human being physically in this head system, this bony, outside head, the

rhythmic system which has the ribs that are part bony and part free as it were, not so fixed as the head - I mean, if we move our head too much we can't think, you know, we have to keep our head still – and then the limbs which, you know, ray out.

34.12    **SA:**        **So the limbs were - - -**

NB:        The limbs ray out and that the thinking lives in this section basically. I mean, every part – I mean, we've got a more bony system there and a more raying out system there and a more, yep. So I mean this would be like a head almost, this wrist area, you know, and then you've got the more rhythmic part then and then the more raying out here, so every part of the body you can go into that with but generally speaking – and in the head our thinking mainly takes place and in this part the feeling and in the limbs the will. I mean, that's what we work with. And so you look at that in the child too, you know, but also the human being and these thinking, feeling and willing Rudolf Steiner sees as soul forces, yes, that live in the human being.

**SA:**        **Thinking - - -**

NB:        Feeling and willing, yep. And that also with the medicine, you know, if there's an imbalance between this – what do you call it? – this pole and the bottom pole, if you like, the metabolic limb system, then the feeling actually brings the balance. This rhythmic system, the heart system, the lungs and the heart bring the balance between the head and the limbs as it were and when things are out of balance you need to treat either one or the other to help bring the balance back again. I mean, I'm not a doctor so I can't give you all the, you know. Yes, actually I could do with some curative eurhythmmy but any rate. Sorry.

**SA:**        **Yes. There's a lot of action going on around here.**

NB:        Yes, sorry, yes. So I've just talked about the head, the limbs and the rhythmic system, John. [break in recording]

36.11        I was living in the limbs, you know, very much, even the baby, you know, with their kicking. The head's fairly big in the baby, usually, compared with



the whole body but, yes, anyway, I don't think I'm going anywhere with that, so, yes.

**SA:** We should just point out that Norma's just come back from overseas so she's feeling, I think, a little bit, you know, unwell, I think.

**NB:** Yes, yes, yes. Anyway, yes.

**SA:** Yes, so was there a society formed when you were - - -

**NB:** There was already a society here, yes. There were in 1920 or '22 – '22, I think – there were seven members or seven people here who wanted to join the society and they had to do that because there was a woman called Edith Williams and she must have heard Steiner in Europe, or heard about anthroposophy in Europe and came back and told others and then there was another woman called [Ruth] Lute Drummond who was - - -

**JB:** I don't know.

**NB:** - - - an artist of some kind – whether it was music, I'm not sure now – and her niece, Ruth Ainsworth, went to England and they heard Steiner speaking in Wales – Wales or Cornwall - - -

**JB:** Yes, yes, I think so.

**NB:** - - - and then they went to the Goetheanum and the Goetheanum had just burnt down. There was a wooden building which the model of is just out here.

**SA:** It's beautiful.

**NB:** Yes, that was the first Goetheanum and it had just burnt down when they got there and Ruth's aunt, Lute, was at what was called the Christmas Foundation meeting when Rudolf Steiner actually re-formed, if you like, the

society. He hadn't actually been a member of the society up till then. So, yes, the roots of the society went right back to there. There were seven members then. I think there are about a hundred and seventy five now, which is not a lot, in Sydney. There are about seven hundred-odd in Australia.

38.17    **SA:**    **And so why did you call it – why isn't it just the Rudolf Steiner Society?**

NB:        Oh, because what he gave he called anthroposophy. He said the name could change in the future but anthropos being the human being and sophy wisdom, so the wisdom of the human being.

JB:        The term is not unique to Steiner. It's also you find it in an 1890 Lloyd's Encyclopaedia and it goes something like "Anthroposophy, dah, dah, dah, dah, the wisdom of man (if such a thing is possible)". And it wasn't his term. He used it because it described what he was on about.

**SA:**        **So he was interested in that, obviously?**

NB:        Well, he'd developed his own - - -

JB:        Yes, yes.

NB:        - - - wisdom of the human being as it were.

JB:        Yes.

NB:        Yes, he actually was slightly clairvoyant when he was young – well, he was clairvoyant when he was young, he could see things that other people didn't see, but he actually trained himself out of that so that he could come to it through thinking. And then he, yes.

JB:        He wanted to make it possible for the ordinary Joe to come to what he knew and so he had a sort of more or less – I don't know whether he trained himself out but blocked something that he had sort of innately and

developed afresh in some sense and he did this through basically presenting this philosophy of freedom which takes thinking as its starting point basically.

40.00 Not just thinking but thinking and perception, the two together as a kind of rhythm, if you will, moving between thinking and perception and conception, thinking and so you're going outward for perception, inward for - - -

NB: Thinking.

JB: - - - thinking, so the two - - -

NB: Intersect.

JB: - - - are part of humanity, if you will, and that needs to grow and each individual can do that. They don't need to because we're free to choose whether we do anything or not but if that process is developed I think you actually get science in fact.

**SA: Because it's quite interesting because it's the thinking that seems to separate because often in religious organisations it's kind of, you know, you're meant to lose the thinking. So in Steiner it's kind of about the – you talked a lot about the thinking.**

JB: Yes, not just the thinking but also the perception as well, visible perception; it's both.

NB: Yes, but with the thinking the need to bring will into it.

**SA: Explain that a bit more.**

NB: Yes. Well, in other words we have to bring some activity into our thinking; the thinking doesn't just stay very intellectual and separated off from other things. And to really think some things through – and he gives six basic

exercises, if you like, for people to do for the path and the first one is concentration. Now, if you want to concentrate on something you actually have to bring will into it, you have to put effort into it in other words and the other side of that then is to then bring the thinking into the heart region. So you're actually bringing this thinking, feeling and willing together but first we have to develop the capacity to think, yes, before we start and that takes will.

42.00    **SA:**    **And what kind of thinking are we talking about? Because, you know, there's lots of different kinds of thinking.**

JB:       Well, above all clear thinking.

NB:       (laugh)

JB:       No, I mean that, absolutely seriously: discerning, clear thinking.

**SA:**       **With no prejudgments?**

JB:       Absolutely, yes. I mean if you have a prejudgment about something you've already blocked your thinking capacity to deal with the issue already, non-starters.

NB:       And that's one of the other – he gives that thinking exercise, then he gives an exercise in will which is to do something at the same time every day, just decide to do something not necessarily that needs to be done but just to give yourself an exercise. It might be just taking my ring off and put it on the table and then put it back on again, yep, but to decide to do that at the same time every day. And that's actually to me bringing thinking into the will because you have to decide to do it and then you have to do it so you're actually developing the will but you're developing the thinking at the same time. And then the third one is called equanimity, so you actually spend some time each day really looking at what your feeling life is doing, if you like, and trying to not be carried away by one thing or the other, yes, but actually stay calm within it, whatever's going on but we don't – I'm not good at equanimity but anyway. And then the fourth one is positivity. So looking at things not to be falsely positive as it were but look for what is positive in each situation but to be aware of what's really there, yes. And then the fifth

one is openness, so to be open to what someone tells you, not just say straight away "Oh, no, that's not it" or "That's not O.K." or "We won't do that" but, you know, always to leave this space for something, yes, to be open.

44.19           And then the sixth one is to actually make the rest of them a practice, an everyday practice. So that's part of his path, yep. And what it does, apart from anything else, is make us decent human beings, I think, you know, and able to have a proper social relationship with people, apart from anything else, yes.

**SA:       So is there meditation involved?**

NB:       Yes, yes, he does give meditations and he - - -

JB:       I was going to say, there'd hardly be a book in here that doesn't have some kind of exercise in it in one form or another. Would you agree?

NB:       Yes, which has some sort of meditative content. But he gives lots of possibilities of meditation. One of them is a meditation on the rose cross where one pictures – I have to try and get that properly but - - -

JB:       Black cross?

NB:       No, no, no, you don't. You start off with a rose, looking at a rose, and you start going up the rose and how that beautiful is and the human being and, you know, that the human being can do lots of things that the rose can't do because the rose is fixed but the human being loses something to be able to do all that, it loses the purity of the rose. So you build up those images, yes, and then you work through to what John said, eventually that you picture this black cross with the roses around it, that you see that part of the human being that's not very pure you picture as a black cross – I think I've got it right.

46.05   JB:       Something like that.

NB: Yes. I worked with it quite a while at one stage but at the moment I haven't got a clear, yes. So that's one meditation that he gives but it could also be a verse of some kind. You know, I work with one that says – I worked with it in German so I'm not sure but "I go to sleep". Anyway, it's a picture of the fact that we go to sleep at night, we enter the spiritual world, we meet, if you like, our guardian being, our guiding being, if you like, and then when we're aware we're aware of the fact that we've had that meeting and that in his words "Its wings will have touched my soul". So it gives you a completely different picture of what you're doing in life, yes; you can wake up in the morning and you feel "Well, yes, there can have been some help during the night" for instance, for whatever it is you want to do and you hope that, yes, that what you do want to do is going to have a moral content and, I suppose, a positive effect in the world, yep. I mean, that's a little bit more like a prayer but it's also a meditation. Well, it's not a prayer, really, it's not asking for anything, it's recognizing something, yes.

**SA: And so what about God – is there a God involved?**

NB: Oh, there are a whole lot of gods.

JB: Millions of them.

NB: But there is, there's still a trinity but Steiner really talks about hierarchies and I think in the church there are also the hierarchies, you know, ranging from angels, archangels, archai, right up to - - -

JB: ..... seraphim, cherubim - - -

NB: Yes, and thrones, yes.

JB: All this is in the bible.

NB: So there are nine hierarchies and they also had a hand in evolution and in how the human being is formed to a certain way.

48.09 **SA: So can you just flesh it out just a little bit for me?**

NB: It's a whole book.

JB: It is, it is.

**SA: Briefly?**

NB: Well, you might do that, John. I don't know. He talks about various stages of the earth that the earth's been through and in a way you could say that the picture he gives is that first the human being was there but not physical but the human being was there and as evolution went on the human being became – it was there as a, if you like, well a spiritual physical if you like and then as a life. In the next stage of evolution life came into it and then in the next stage of evolution a soul life, if you like, and in the last stage on earth the physical became mineral. So the mineral kingdom wasn't – so you got in a way the human kingdom to begin with, then the plant kingdom – sorry, then the beginning of the animal kingdom but the human was like a plant at that stage, then the beginning of the plant kingdom and at that stage the human was more like an animal until earth where the human got an ego and the earth became solid so that also the physical body mineral, you know, we got a mineral physical body. Does that clear that up? It's not very clear.

JB: And these beings that the old Christian terminology talks about and also many other cultures talk about or ranges of beings, the essence of what Norma's just said, to me is all these entities made sacrifices.

50.08 So the essence of evolution is not accidents like Darwin and others sort of have it but sacrifice so that every entity makes a sacrifice that makes the physical possible, another series of entities make sacrifices which makes the living part of our being possible and further sacrifices enable the soul life to occur from all these entities. And then finally – at least on the earth - it's not the end of the story, of course, but on the earth the ego nature is sacrificed from another series of beings, done of course on the ..... See, all this is for me belief.

NB: Yes.

JB: I don't know that but I need it for myself to make a satisfactory picture of things into which I can then work with hopefully my own experience and discover a bit more. And, for instance, the simple notion that there are four kingdoms, the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom and the human kingdom, is an expression of those sacrifices if you will – that's my belief. On the other hand, I can look at those four kingdoms and start to see distinctions in them – that I can know. You know, I'm not going to try and eat a lump of coal whereas I might eat a cabbage - - -

NB: I like it.

JB: - - - if you can see the difference. Now, I'm not being facetious, there's a very real difference. One has life and the other may have had life but it doesn't any more and the animal kingdom is different again and as human being is another level. So four distinct stages if you will.

NB: So this is another picture of a human being and I was talking about the thinking, feeling and willing and the soul life before and I didn't, say, start to talk about body, soul and spirit but here you've got another picture where you've got a physical body, a life body, a soul body and an ego and then the ego can work on the soul body so you get another higher level and then it works on the life body and you get another higher level as well and then it can work on the physical body. So our physical body can actually become some far distant time as spiritualised, so that's another higher level as well.

52.31 So you've got those levels of the human being that you're working with, yes. And illness often is these things coming out of balance, yes.

**SA: And what about reincarnation?**

NB: Oh, yes.

JB: Fundamental, fundamental. One of the key thoughts for me there is that if you do something in this world you take responsibility for it and if you sort of die and that's it, where's the responsibility gone. The individuality, the being that is Sue or John or whoever, actually has that responsibility that continues past death for what they've done because how else is it going to be sorted out, you know, who's going to work with it? The church will say



it's salvation – well, some churches anyway – to me that's a cop-out. No doubt there's a whole other aspect to that too but it seems to me that we need to take our deeds into the after deaths experience and remodel what we can then bring back, we remodel our bodies so to speak and bring back what we are in fact choosing to bring back. So what we are now, at least in part of our being is the result of what we did and participated in in our previous life and before that and before that but part of our being is free to do more aid or gift more things to the world or damage it.

54.15

We can do both, that's our freedom. This is the amazing thing: we have this freedom to help or hinder, broadly. So, yes, reincarnation is a mere necessity.

NB: So you could say that what we're experiencing in this life, what we're going through, it was actually a pre-earthly decision, pre-birth decision on our part that we have to go through that.

JB: But we don't necessarily fulfill it fully.

NB: No.

JB: We have a go at it insofar as we're really aware, really, really awake to what we may have worked with in the experience in the spiritual world beforehand. I mean, this is again for me belief and I'm exactly – I don't know this, it just makes common sense to me.

**SA: And that's the Society's beliefs as well?**

JB: Well, for the most part. Each person would put their own spin on it.

NB: Yes, I'd like to say that I don't think the Society has beliefs.

JB: No, no.

NB: I think each individual has to work with Steiner's work in whatever way they work with it and they will speak but one can't speak for "the Society" - - -

JB: No.

NB: - - - because the Society is a whole lot of individuals and there's no sort of – shouldn't be any dogma.

JB: No.

NB: You might get some people who are members who are very dogmatic about one thing or another but there shouldn't be any dogma.

JB: It should be a work in progress and a developing spiritual science for each individual in their own way, entirely their own way. However, with cooperation, hopefully, with others.

NB: Yes. I mean, we work together; we have a study group and we might have differing opinions about what's mean by what Steiner says or whatever but we study it together and we grow in a certain sense, if you like, or get clearer through other people's examples, pictures, you know, it all works together then, yes.

56.14 **SA: So maybe we could talk about the history of the Society.**

NB: The Society here in Sydney?

**SA: In Sydney.**

NB: Yes.

**SA: Can you give me a bit of a .....**

NB: That's what we were going to do, wasn't it? Oh, dear.

**SA: Could you establish what - - -**

NB: I think I mentioned those people in the early days. There was seven of them and then – oh, gosh, now my memory is really worrying – that there has always been a feeling in Sydney of this connection with Steiner because of these people having met him at that time. But it began in a way in a room in Hosking Place in – what was it called, the house?

JB: Penfold Place.

NB: Penfold Place, Hosking Place – Hosking House, was it?

JB: Penfold Place, I remember that.

NB: Anyway, yes.

**SA: And where's that?**

JB: Near Martin Place now.

NB: Well, behind where Penfold's are in Pitt Street now there's a little laneway that goes there and there was this funny old building. That was where I first went, a funny old building with an old lift that you went upstairs to. And when the Society moved out of there they actually formed a relationship with the Australian Dental Association, so the next two buildings they went into was with them. But to go right back again, there were various people involved and in 19 – yes, there was a woman called Alice Crowther who trained in speech and eurhythm in Dornach, which is the headquarters of the Society at the Goetheanum, and she came back and she started a speech and drama school in Hamilton Street in the city.

58.10 JB: It's near Australia Square.

NB: And she did a lot of work and she actually – there was one play which I'd have to look up to see, which was produced which got high acclaim and she also was – I have to look, sorry. She was also – it's all over the place, that's the trouble. Anyway, so she had quite a group around here. There were also the [Walter and Marion Mahoney] Burley Griffins at Castlecrag and they became members in the 1930s and they used to have – they built that amphitheatre at Castlecrag and they used to have plays there in eurhythmy. We've seen some footage – it looks very strange, I have to say – but anyway that's what they did there.

**SA: So when did she set up ....**

NB: In the '40s, Alice Crowther. I'm just looking, if I can find it. Lute Drummond became ill in 1948, so she stopped being the general secretary in 1948 – I think she started in about 1935. But where's Alice Crowther here? Do you remember anything, John, about Alice Crowther?

JB: Not particularly. I know quite a number of people who valued her work an awful lot.

NB: Work very much, yes. I was told by someone once that she was the best speech and drama teacher in Sydney. And I was having some speech lessons. I'd had a front tooth taken out and I felt sort of my speech wasn't quite right and I took some speech lessons and the person I took them from was ill and Alice for some reason – I didn't know her at the time – took me and somebody from the studio that I was going to said that she was the best speech teacher in Sydney and she had a really very good reputation and she worked with actors quite a lot. But where am I?

60.29 JB: Talk about the Burley Griffins.

NB: Well, you talk about the Burley Griffins if you like.

JB: Do you know about Burley Griffin, you know, planning Canberra and all that? But he also did quite a few houses around the place and in Melbourne and a cinema in Melbourne.

NB: And in Sydney.

JB: Yes. His wife seems to be the more strongly – Marion Griffin, more strongly into anthroposophy as such and I've never been sure of Burley Griffin's connection but he certainly had a highly artistic approach to architecture.

NB: He joined the Society but whether that was just because of Marion or whether it was – yes, I don't know.

JB: Yes, so there's all this connection that - - -

**SA: You don't have to worry about that, just a part of it. So then you were saying that so it was around about the '30s that the Society was moving around with the dentists?**

JB: No, not then.

NB: No, that was much later, that was in our time, actually - - -

JB: Yes.

NB: - - - because when I first went they were in Hosking House or Hosking Place, whichever it was, yes. So they first went to Castlereagh Street in a much bigger area. They also started to import ..... products which were developed out of some of Steiner's indications and they had a little bookshop. John and I in 1972 – I was doing a university course at night and we were asked if we would be – I won't go into the history but anyway they needed someone to run the bookshop.

62.06 And I had a full time job, we both had full time jobs, we were both doing our university courses at night.

**SA: What year did you say this was?**

JB: '68.

NB: About '70.

JB: '70?

NB: '70, I think.

JB: Yes.

NB: Was it '70?

JB: Something like that, something like that.

NB: We were married in '67, weren't we?

JB: Yes.

NB: '67, we were married.

JB: \*\*\*\*\* was born in '74.

NB: '74. So it was before that.

JB: And she was in the bookshop.

NB: Yes, yes.

**SA:** O.K, so you were - - -

**NB:** Anyway, we were asked if we would do it and we said if they couldn't get anyone else, yes, and of course it ended up being that. We actually had a youth group in the late '60s; John started it with another person - - -

**JB:** John Shaw.

**NB:** - - - John Shaw who's now a lawyer.

**JB:** Barrister.

**NB:** But, yes, and in 1969 we met with some people in Melbourne, young people in Melbourne and had a little conference and then in 1971 we organised a big youth conference here, I think over a hundred from around Australia. Yes, but to go back, what I think is interesting is that these seven people seemed to achieve so much in these early days, you know, and so far away from where all – you know, in Europe anthroposophy was very strong, in Germany and Switzerland and even - - -

**JB:** Holland, yes.

**NB:** - - - England to a certain extent, Holland. But this little group way, way, way away from it all, you know, really became quite a strong little group and it was really – it says here "In 1942 Lute Drummond encouraged the capable and efficient speech and drama teacher, Alice Crowther, to return to Australia". Actually, "She trained" yes, "in speech drama and eurhythmy at Dornach and taught in England. She established a studio in Hamilton Street" and it was 'Iphigenia in Taurus' that was ranked by the ABC as the most notable production of the year, 1950, yes.

64.19 **SA:** So you started the bookshop?

**NB:** No, no. Well, we did but - - -

JB: Well, yes and no.

NB: We're jumping all over the place, aren't we? But we agreed to – but this little shop was on the second floor - -

JB: Upstairs.

NB: - - - of the building and it just had a few books.

JB: Was that Clarence?

NB: In Clarence Street and it had a few books for sale and it was manned two afternoons a week and we agreed to take it on but we couldn't man it during the daytime, so we opened it Saturdays and volunteers manned it during the week still but we took on the ordering and, you know, the accounting side. I became the treasurer of the Society when \*\*\*\*\* was born in 1974 - -  
-

JB: That's our daughter.

NB: - - - when our daughter was born in 1974 - but that was 1972, I think that we took over the bookshop, actually. And then after we'd had our daughter there was a real groundswell sense of "We need a proper bookshop with a streetfront and everything".

JB: With, you know, a fronting for the public.

NB: So we were living at Rozelle at the time and I saw a shop for rental and I thought "Oh, that could be good, so we could open a bookshop there". So I looked at it and it didn't work but they introduced us to another shop which looked just right, lovely place for \*\*\*\*\* to play, ha, ha, and so we opened that bookshop there. So, on behalf of the Society but we guaranteed the rent and all that sort of thing and some members contributed.



JB: Yes, Norma and I guaranteed the rent would be paid

NB: Yep.

JB: People were a bit iffy about letting us do that.

NB: Yes, yes. Yes, some of the older members of the Society thought "What are these young people doing?"

66.01 **SA: When you say "there", where is "there"?**

NB: At Rozelle.

**SA: In Rozelle, right.**

NB: Yes, yes. And actually quite a few people used to come by and people from – of course there was Balmain Teachers College in the area and, yes, it was interesting, I enjoyed it.

**SA: Did the Society operate from there as well?**

JB: No.

NB: No, no. They were still in Clarence Street in this second floor place and that was kept open, that little bookshop there, but we introduced children's books and toys and we had a place for people to see the work from the curative places, so the places for children in need of special care, and also from the school. So we had an example of work there for people to look at. We used to often have people come and sit there for hours, wanting to talk, maybe with crossed legs – but anyway – sit on our little table where we had all the stuff; you know, I can remember one guy in particular. But then it really was too much for me with a young child who was one year old and I said that I would do it for another year but actually someone came along and offered to take it over pretty quickly, so that was good. And then when

the Society bought this building in 1978 and moved in – oh, it might have been '77 – they had a lot of work to do on it.

**SA: Could you just say where it is, this building?**

NB: This building, 307 Sussex Street in the city. And there was quite a lot of work to do on it – it might have been '78 – and it had its first meeting here in December '78 but it was officially opened in February '79 and of course when this opened the bookshop moved into here and so it was all in one which was good.

JB: And it's been here ever since.

NB: Yes. What we felt we wanted to do was – people could get anthroposophical books from the Theosophical Society, Theosophical Bookshop, but we wanted somewhere where they found the Society and the movement, in other words, the schools and the work that came out of anthroposophy at the same time they found the books and that's one of the reasons why we wanted to open the bookshop.

68.13 I mean, the ideal would have been to have a coffee shop as well but that never happened.

JB: It was our personal version of the '60s revolution you could say.

NB: Yes.

JB: Well, one aspect.

NB: Yes. And, yes, so that was the bookshop. With the Burley Griffins, one of his partners, one of Burley Griffin's partners, Eric Nicholls, also worked on Castlecrag and he actually was the general secretary of the Society. There had been some land left to the Society in Belrose and it was called 'Glenaeon' and that property was sold and the Society made the decision at the time. There was some dissent but the Society made the decision to use

the money from that sale to buy land for a school and they wanted to start a school and Sylvia Brose went to Edinburgh to train as a teacher. She always wanted to be a eurythmist but she went to Edinburgh to train as a teacher. She had worked at Frensham and so did Ruth Ainsworth actually; there's a house down there named after Ruth. And she came back and became the first teacher at the school in 1957.

JB: 7, 1957.

NB: 1957, so that's when the school started.

**SA: Really?**

JB: In Pymble.

NB: And it started – they bought the land at Middle Cove but they started the school in a building that was already existing; it was called Dalcross. And when they got up to about Class 3 they moved the whole lot – well, they didn't move the whole lot at first; they started some classes at Middle Cove and then eventually the whole school moved over to Middle Cove. And then in 1971 Lorien Novalis started as a school.

70.10 JB: Here at Glenhaven.

NB: Inala which was a school for children in need of special care started about '58, I think.

JB: In Dural.

NB: No, not in Dural but what's now Castle Hill or .....

JB: Was it? O.K.

NB: But, yes, Dural was Warrah - - -

JB: Right, sorry, yes.

NB: - - - which was in the '60s.

JB: Yes, that's right, Inala's at Castle Hill, yes.

NB: But what happened was that the Society brought a doctor and his wife out to Australia, an anthroposophical doctor. He had to do a whole internship here again because, you know, he came from – even though he was very highly thought of in Germany he had to – you know, wasn't accepted in Australia until he did an internship and so on. And they actually – Kyra Pohl, his wife, had experience working with children in need of special care and they started Inala – well mainly Kyra but Joachim Pohl worked there too in 1957.

JB: Pennant Hills.

NB: So that was the beginning of, yes, Inala, and then out of that later on grew Warrah which is at Dural, and also Miroma which is at Vacluse.

JB: All of which are still going.

NB: Yes. Miroma's more now a place for adults to work but the other two still have young children and some of the older children too – older people, I mean, now.

**SA: So you've got schools closer to the city though?**

NB: No. Well, Glenaeon's at Middle Cove.

**SA: Right.**

NB: That's the closest. There was one at Randwick at one stage but it was on land that was owned by the navy, I think, and they had told them that they would eventually be able to buy some land but they sold it off for development instead and the school could never find somewhere else in the eastern suburbs that they could afford so it closed, yes.

72.09 **SA: I'm curious to know why the Society chose to stay in the centre of Sydney.**

JB: That's very important, actually.

NB: Yes, yes, it is.

**SA: So why is that?**

JB: Accessibility to ordinary people basically.

NB: Initially, a lot of the members came from the North Shore but there was a feeling that we didn't want it to be a North Shore society, yep, and now members come from all over Sydney. So, as John said, it's accessible and when people – for the bookshop, anyway – when people come up from the country or other places it's again very accessible. It would be in a way good to have somewhere with some trees around, you know, and more space than we've got here because we are restricted in the space – it's a very narrow building – but I don't think we'll ever afford, we certainly won't in the near future afford another building in the city and it really is – every time we have an overseas visitor, lecturer, they say "Never let it go" because it's in the heart of – I mean, it's not in the heart of Sydney but it's in area - - -

JB: It's good enough.

NB: - - - that's got activity and where people live and – sorry, not live and work.

JB: Well, they do live too.

NB: Yes, there's a lot happening, that's what I'm trying to say. So that was the reason to stay here but it's got its drawback and there's still some people who think we should go out to Parramatta or somewhere with lots of land and so on and make some beautiful place but, I don't know, you see, anthroposophy is not just for one's own self satisfaction, it has that spiritual path in it that one can follow but it's not just for our own development, it's actually for what we can do in the world - - -

74.04 JB: By following a spiritual path.

NB: - - - you know, what can you bring to humanity? And in a way I think we also belong as a society in the middle of things in a way. You know, I don't think it's healthy to just say "Oh, this is all awful" and we move away from it. We have to in a way embrace the awful and be part of it and bring our own whatever we can out of ourselves into it, rather than just push it away and say "No, we don't want to know about that". Yep, that's my take on it and I think that's what anthroposophy's about, yes.

**SA: So with numbers, you said initially that there were seven core members and you said it's grown to a hundred and seventy - - -**

NB: Five.

**SA: - - - five.**

NB: Which is not huge for Sydney but, yes, no.

**SA: Did it kind of grow really quickly and then stabilise or has it just kind of grown slowly?**

NB: I think it's just grown slowly over the years from what I can think but I'd have to go back and look at numbers to be sure, yes.

**SA: Because now you have a school here too.**

NB: Yes.

**SA: So when did that start?**

NB: You mean in here?

**SA: Yes, in here.**

NB: Well, it started first in Liverpool Street. Actually, the impetus came for it back in the late '60s, early '70s, I'd say. Do you remember when it started in Liverpool Street?

JB: Well, years ago it had all sorts of seminars and workshops all over the place. Remember?

NB: Yes, we did, we had - - -

JB: When it was an orientation course.

NB: - - - Minto one – yes, orientation course. But what I'm saying is when did that impetus start? I know that I stopped going to meetings because I had \*\*\*\*\*, so it had to be, I would say, the early '70s. It's in here somewhere but I would say the early '70s.

JB: Well, we had this meeting up at Edith - - -

NB: Yes, at Martindale, at Edith Cryer's place.

JB: That was to me where it really began.

NB: Yes, but that was – I think it must have been. And then, I don't know, I couldn't say when it moved into here.

76.09 JB: No, nor could I.

NB: It as in Liverpool Street and Irwin eventually sold his building. He had a photography studio there. I think eventually sold it and it moved into here.

**SA: And it was important to start the school up so that you had teachers teaching the philosophy?**

JB: Well, some of us felt that, just like Norma and I felt, that there needed to be a public face. As far as this school here, if you will, or college was concerned, it was more a question of adult education broadly, I suppose, and making that available to people. And so we had these courses here but over at – what street is it? - - -

NB: Liverpool.

JB: - - - Liverpool Street first and then it came here and it's been here ever since, except for one year.

NB: That's right. It went out to Inala for a year.

JB: Inala for one year.

NB: But the idea was, from my memory, that Irwin went on a trip overseas and he started a bakery too at Glebe, which is no longer in existence, but he saw how they were working with people who had drug problems with baking and how healthy that was for them to, you know, be kneading the bread and doing that.

**SA: I miss that bakery.**



NB: You do? You remember it, do you?

**SA: Yes, I do, I remember it.**

NB: Yes, yes, yes, yes. But lots of other people started making good bread too and I think that, yes, somewhere along the line that fell away.

**SA: Sorry to distract you there.**

NB: But anyway – what was I going to say now?

**SA: You were saying that people - - -**

NB: Oh, yes, the idea was I think that initially to do things which actually where people could learn about anthroposophy, yes, so in the arts because it always includes the arts, the arts and the thinking sphere and the doing sphere.

78.04 Yes, so that's how it started and then there was also this wish to have a teacher training course and there were, I suppose – what do you call them? – not accredited courses but there were courses also to help. And I did one of those and I did my Dip. Ed., I don't know, when I was about forty or something, I did it by correspondence with UNE [University of New England], but John did his when he was forty-odd; he was an engineer and started teaching at forty four. But, yes, what was I going to say? Yes, so that was really to introduce people to Steiner education as well, give them a background in Steiner education, and some of those courses took part at Glenaeon. And then the course actually eventually became accredited, this 'Orientation in Anthroposophy' and the teacher training, so it became a two year course. And at that stage actually people could do that and go and teach in a school but they had to of course do work experience and so on but they could do that but now of course you can't teach in a school in New South Wales unless you've got full accreditation. So, now the course is for two years and then the people who do that at some universities get two years' credit. At one stage they could do it by distance at UNE for the last two years but that's changed but some universities will give them a year and a half credit or a year credit and some will give them two years' credit and they can finish their Bachelor of Education that way and then teach in a

school. Yes, so that's how that course works and that's been going for, oh, quite a while now.

80.03 JB: Yes, in the '80s, I thought.

NB: Yes, you run into ex-students – because I used to do some teaching at ..... College – you run into ex-students everywhere, yep.

**SA: And so there's positions available in the schools?**

NB: Oh, absolutely. It is so hard for schools to get people who are actually trained Steiner teachers, it's really hard, and also to get people who actually are prepared to work with the background and, yes, teach out of that.

JB: There's a danger of, as Norma pointed out earlier, a lapse into a methodology. You just take a sort of recipe and you don't necessarily change yourself and develop yourself in doing it, you just follow the bullet points and that's a danger, always, with this.

NB: I heard a teacher speak recently when I was in Dornach and he said that his biggest teachers in life were his students, his children that he had in classes and that's what the teacher has to be prepared for, you know, not – yes, to really try to see who's there in front of them and how that child's going to develop, yes.

**SA: So that whole kind of – in inverted commas – “belief system” of Steiner about the four kind of centres is important?**

NB: That's right, yes, yes, yes.

JB: It becomes a kind of a filter or a set of glasses through which one can start to look at things and then it's up to you how much you look at things and how much you then build up your picture but you're going to add not just the concept side, the belief side, if you will, but also the experiential and, as I was saying earlier, the knitting together of those two is how I think we validate the whole process and how we validate our experience, our picture and think and take the education further as a constant research exercise.

82.01

One of the things that Steiner apparently said somewhere was that really every Waldorf teacher is actually a researcher as well and I'll go as far as to say that every agriculturalist is a researcher because while there's things are known there's something to research, it's blatantly obvious, and especially with the depth that we seem to need to get to to actually be helpful, you know, whether it's architecture or music or maths or whatever, speech, putatively. You know, there's a constant research task for every single human being and that's no less so for the teaching fraternity. Steiner gave some things to teachers which a lot of scientists and others still don't understand. He kind of seeded possibilities by which we could look at the world and then develop themes. I mean, I've tried to do the same for myself but lots of other people are doing it all the time. To sort of just almost one idea from him, you know, from some lecture or other, and it's like a kind of seed point for a life, for your own life. It's incredible, you know, because it makes sense.

**SA:** Steiner certainly over the last couple of – or maybe the last decade, there seems to be has a lot more - - -

**JB:** Exposure?

**SA:** - - - exposure. Am I right? Like a lot more people know about Steiner now than what they did before and the principles or is that just what I - - -

**NB:** Could be, I don't know.

**JB:** Maybe a bit more openness to it, I suppose, I'm not sure.

**SA:** I was going to ask you – you know, I know Steiner was here before or the Society was here before the 1970s – but, you know, the interest in it. Like the '70s was a time where - - -

**NB:** Yes.

**SA:** - - - embracing a lot more, you know, sort of a broader definition of spirituality and so on. Do you think it was like a particularly - - -

84.09 JB: Well, as Norma said earlier, we had these youth conferences which we ran, effectively, with colleagues in Melbourne and with the help of some of the older folk as well we wouldn't have probably been able to do it without. At Inala we did two of them and one was in Melbourne. We had probably over a hundred to all of these – didn't we?

NB: Not the Melbourne one but the other two.

JB: No, but there was quite a number there. But there was an interest – put it that way, you know.

NB: That was the end of the '60s, early '70s, really.

JB: Yes.

NB: I think you're right, I think there was a groundswell then.

**SA: Now, also too I was interested to see how the Society differs from theosophy. Because you were saying that you were a member of the Theosophical - - -**

JB: YTs, Young Theosophists, yes, yes.

**SA: Yes, so like what is the difference then? Because it seems to be like kind of similar.**

JB: Well, there's multiple differences but one of them is the approach to the Christian stream of understanding of the world. Some of the people in the Theosophical Society saw a particular relationship between a man called Krishnamurti – who you've probably heard of – and the reincarnated Christ, and Steiner couldn't buy into that at all, he had other knowledge that said differently and he's developed – I mean, some of his early work, actually, in the early 1900s, from about 1907 to about 1914, I think, roughly, he gave a whole series of lectures on the gospels, for instance, trying to tease out

what was behind many of the statements made in the good old bible, for instance, you know, and he developed that thing very strongly.

86.02 So behind this anthroposophy is a very – well, some people call it esoteric Christianity, which to my mind makes sense and so I could take some of that on board and take a lot of interest in that as helping my personal picture. I think, yes, that's a sort of direction which is very different from what the theosophists had to offer, which was basically dominated by Tibetan gurus and others and the things that the Mahatmas, for instance, said, and that various other people who claimed they were clairvoyants, like people like [C W] Leadbetter had to say about things – quite different.

NB: When Rudolf Steiner first started lecturing, he actually – well, he was invited by some people in the Theosophical Society to come and meet with them and talk to them and that was his audience in the first few years, the Theosophical Society and it was really the more he started speaking about the Christ being and didn't go along with the Krishnamurti story was when eventually the break came and some people asked him if he would, yes, start just meeting with people about anthroposophy. Yes, and here, I don't know. I guess people were spiritually searching - I mean, I'm only guessing now – spiritually searching and the Theosophical Society was where you could find something and then they moved on, yes. I mean, the Theosophical Society is very – I mean if you look at the books they're very eclectic. The Anthroposophical Society is basically concentrated on Rudolf Steiner's work. It doesn't mean people won't go and read other things and see what else feeds in or not but as far as the bookshop is concerned basically it's connected with Rudolf Steiner's work and what Rudolf Steiner called the "being anthroposophia". So what he says is that that's a real being that exists, yes.

88.25 **SA: A real being?**

NB: A being, yes. A spiritual being but, yes.

JB: In a certain sense. So one of the views is that behind every group is another entity and that being gives the quality of the combined working of individuals. Like a school has a certain quality. You know, when people, say, talk about Glenaeon they think a little bit differently from if they're talking about some other school down the road, you know, that has a certain quality, a certain sort of expression of its nature, a soul nature, if you will, and that can be seen as embodied in a particular entity which doesn't have a physical body, except for the individuals who are part of it. So it sort

of comes and goes, as it were. Like for instance IBM, the huge computer thing, that has an entity. If you start to think like that you think "Wow", you know, "What about BHP then?" No, seriously, absolutely seriously, and there's a whole study of the social sciences that comes out of this that works with this and talks about how groups work and can develop and grow and also destroy themselves and the various qualities of these entities. You know, so it becomes – in a certain way you can kind of validate the whole notion by sort of sensing the quality of what you see or what you feel as much as anything, you know, in a particular school or in a particular group of gossiping people or – yes, absolutely.

90.03    **SA:**    **And has that changed over time or has that been a fairly static kind of – not static because I know there's a dynamism in everything but I mean I'm going to hate but calling it "belief" but those kind of ideals or principles, have they kind of remained the same over the years?**

JB:       Well, I like to think that the whole thing's growing all the time. In fact, I can't see any point if it's not.

NB:       But is it?

JB:       Well, that's another issue - there's always difficulties with things. Most of us – well, not most of us, I shouldn't say that – but many of us get stuck. For instance, we might stay with what we knew thirty years ago and think that's how it should be for the next thirty years. Well, the next generation will tell you that's bull dust, you know.

**SA:**       **So the beliefs of the Society or principles are kind of in - - -**

JB:       Well, if what Steiner gave us is objective knowledge then how can that change? It can be added to but if it's initially objective knowledge in the first place - - -

NB:       It can be expanded, yes.

JB:       Expanded, yes. I mean if let's say this notion of reincorporation or reincarnation is a truth then all we can do, it seems to me, is get more

knowledge of it if it's a truth in the first place and, you know, Steiner's not the first presenter of that, Buddha was, you know, overt sense and I think it's embedded in countless other cultures' beliefs, you know. I believe our Aboriginal folk here have ceremonies for people who have died well after they've died. Why? Because they're still there, things like that. I mean, I don't know that – I'd love to know a bit more about that, actually. But Buddha had the notion of the – what do they call them? – the four truths or something and how one of them, you know, is you needed to work on yourself – what's it called? – the eightfold path to work upon yourself so that you redeem, you made it no longer necessary to reincarnate.

92.10            Now, that's changed since the Christian picture emerged and that being brought but nevertheless the notion of reincarnation was alive and well for ages before Christ, actually.

NB:            Yes, the picture Steiner gives is that if you purify yourself to that extent that Buddha's then you look back and you think "I've got to go back to earth to help people", yes.

JB:            You don't .... that.

NB:            Otherwise, he says, you're following a black path.

JB:            Yes, yes.

NB:            But that's a change in humanity and a change in consciousness as well. So what the Buddha said at his time is right for that time but it changes over time and really – you know you asked about how things change but that's our, in a way, challenge, to really see how things are changing and really to be able to get to that point where we can see enough ourselves to know what's best now and I don't know that a lot of us get that far.

JB:            For instance, the whole picture of evolution would be a bit different, very different from the modern scientific materialism. That's the only thing I can call it anyway, because one would see in this story that there've been these sacrifices that have led through to an evolution or a devolution, really, of the beings to become human and now, it's only now that we can actually evolve so that we become responsible entities on the planet to take and make a

contribution to the world. So as Norma points out, do we reincarnate not just to sort out our karma but to make a contribution?

94.06 **SA: So is that the challenge for the Society then as a body of people?**

NB: Yes, I think for the Society they can encourage the members to practice whatever, meditation, to work on themselves, they can encourage that. They can't do anything other than that. And then what are you talking about when you talk about "the Society"? Maybe you're talking about the people who are responsible at the moment but the whole idea is that everybody is responsible. Yes, I mean there's a Society in Switzerland and there's what's called an executive council of that and they make certain decisions but again the Society will never be any more than the members of the Society make it.

JB: Wherever they are.

NB: Wherever they are, yes. And if they don't do the inner work and if they don't – and I mean I'm usually too busy in a way, you know, so I can say I don't do enough – but if they don't do the inner work then nothing will happen because you can't say "Those people up there should do it and they should make the decisions". It's not the way we are today; we have to make the decisions, each one of us; that's what freedom's about and that's what's being a human individuality is about today. That's my picture from Steiner and it's what speaks to me, you know, as something that we have to do.

**SA: And so will you stay – your wish is to stay in this building and be part of the city?**

JB: Who knows?

NB: Who knows, who knows? I mean, I would like to see us stay in the inner city but someone else might come along who makes other decisions, another group of people – that's fine, you know.



JB: Both Norma and myself have been part of this sort of running of things for years in one degree or another but we're not young any more and so we're choosing to do more a little bit sideways things maybe.

96.12 I don't know if that's the right way of saying it but I, myself, am doing my own research which I regard – purely a personal egotism – as a development of aspects of Steiner's work because I think it's the chance of every single individual has who takes an interest in it is to not sort of just sit on it and say "Look how great I am and how much I know" but "This becomes a means by which I can explore things, understand things with greater depth" and therefore provide a kind of – I mean, I can't see for instance how all the schools and the farms and everything, all the other activities, are going to be fruitful unless there's constant research which feeds them, yes. And they'll die if they don't have a continual added knowledge and that could be from within the group of farmers or whatever but it could also be from research groups other than that in what we call this here, a School of Spiritual science. A real school of spiritual science will be developing and strengthening and trying to understand and helping all the other activities out there and that happens, I believe, to some extent but probably nowhere near as much as it should.

NB: Yes, there is within the Society something called the School of Spiritual Science which Rudolf Steiner gave special meditations for and it deals with, I guess, working from the lower ego which is flawed in many ways and which is subject to all sorts of temptations and to actually cross the threshold into the spiritual world we meet a guardian of the threshold and that's spoken about in Knowledge of Higher Worlds as well.

98.02 And we go from meeting this little eye to crossing the threshold and meeting what Steiner calls "the true eye" in these nineteen lessons that he gave. People have to have been members of the Society for at least two years and actually have to be accepted into that school but the idea is then that you would research, yes, and use that as the basis of research, yes.

JB: That's that whole point of it to me because for me he gave those lessons and those activities to meditation and so on so that you can do your work in the world basically.

NB: And within that school there are sections. There's one on agriculture, there's one on education, there's one on medicine, there's one on - - -

JB: Mathematics, astronomy.

NB: - - - mathematics, astronomy, there's one on natural science, there's one on  
- - -

JB: There's a general section.

NB: - - - yes, the general section, there's one on the fine arts, there's one on the  
performing arts - not the fine arts but belles-lettres, if you like – the  
performing arts and the visual arts. Sorry, yes.

JB: Had enough?

**SA: Well, look, it's been very - - -**

NB: It's a bit all over the place, I'm sorry, yes, yes.

**SA: - - - no, no, it's been very, very interesting. Is there anything else that  
you think that it's important that we cover in the interview?**

NB: There was another aspect of anthroposophy but I've forgotten it again now.  
It came to me while we were talking at one stage and I've forgotten it again  
but we've covered karma and we've covered evolution and we've covered a  
picture of the human being.

JB: One of the things that was put forward by Steiner initially was that we really  
do need a new knowledge of the world and that the current materialism, that  
the whole world will just die out and fade away or even destroy itself unless  
there is in individuals – and individuals can only happen in individuals a  
rediscovery of the spirits.

100.01 It won't be something that's done carte blanche, it won't be done like –  
excuse the expression – a Hillsong [Church] or something like that or rah,  
rahing and this, that and the other, it just won't be like that, it'll be by  
individuals personally discovering for themselves a new approach to life and  
everything through their own spirituality. There's a man in Melbourne called  
– what was his name? – he's just been given another book out recently – he

talks of spirituality with a small s. All the big groups are sort of equal, the churches and so on, are the big S but he reckons the future lies with the small s, namely the spirituality that we ourselves discover personally. And to me Steiner hasn't sort of said "This is how you do it", he said "I share this with you, it may help you, and away you go". Now, he wanted us to do our work, simple as that.

**SA: So is that what is really appealing about Steiner, is that it's about kind of not so much dogma but kind of personal exploration?**

JB: For me, yes.

NB: M'mm.

JB: For me. I can't speak for anybody else, you see, but I can speak for me, yes.

NB: The work he gave on agriculture and medicine and education came out of questions to him. He didn't just tell people, people asked him questions and he gave those lectures as a result of that. So, yes, I think it's a struggle to understand him, often.

JB: Yes, a lot of people don't like it; it's too hard.

**SA: So why are you so - - -**

NB: Because I see how it fits.

JB: It makes sense.

NB: I see it does make sense and also one can match little bits with one's experience. You know, I'm not clairvoyant but I know that some things are correct, I know that I've been here before, if you like, you know, I know that; there are some things that I know.

102.03 **SA:** **How can you be so sure? Sorry, this is getting very probing here.**

**NB:** Well, you just know. I mean not just because you've been told but you have a sense of it, you have an experience of it.

**JB:** Yes, I'm different, I can't say that but the only thing that makes sense to me is that I must have been, otherwise I wouldn't have the body I have or the capacities that I have or the challenges I have. You know, I can't say it with more conviction.

**NB:** But don't you have a sense that some of it actually came from another time and relations with people and so on, yes?

**JB:** Yes, oh, absolutely a sense of it but I wouldn't call it knowledge.

**NB:** Knowing.

**JB:** You know, but that doesn't gainsay that it makes such obvious sense that, you know, we've been through this, we in fact to me have built the world we have, you know. For all I know, I was a bricklayer in a cathedral a couple of incarnations ago or one incarnation ago perhaps, I don't know; the timeframe is fairly elastic in these things. But, you know, it makes sense, it just makes sense.

**SA:** **O.K. Well, I think that's a really good place to end the interview.**

**NB:** Stop, yes.

**SA:** **So, thank you so much, both of you for your time.**

**Interview ends**

