CITY OF SYDNEY

ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Henry Brown

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

Place: Erskineville

Date: 3 September 1994

Analogue recording converted to digital

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR:** **Interview with Mr Henry Brown, 3rd of September 1994.**

Mr Brown, you were born here in this house in Erskineville, weren't you?

HB: Yes.

SR: **What year was that?**

HB: In ******** 1919.

SR: **What are your earliest memories of this area?**

HB: Well, one of the very early memories, just up here where these new units are on the other side of the Devine Street there used to be a brick wall there and originally that was Ross' Glassworks and it was very early – I don't remember much about it – but when I was two or three that burnt down and it was a very big fire and of course then later on they built Spencer shoe factory there and then it become a trading company and then they pulled it down and built – these are the latest, just about the latest units in Erskineville. Also, on this corner where the other new townhouses are, that used to be a terrazzo factory that belonged to Peter Callender and all the terrazzo steps in the Museum Station and the War Memorial were all made in that factory there.

SR: **You've lived here all your life, haven't you?**

HB: Except for when I was in the army and when I was married I lived for two or three years at Bondi.

SR: What kind of place was this in the 1920s?

HB: The house itself?

SR: The neighbourhood.

1.57 HB: The neighbourhood. It's always been the same; it's always been a very friendly neighbourhood. It's been a neighbourhood where everybody helped one another; even through the Depression if anybody was in any strife everybody'd hop in and help them. And then you had, later on into the '30s you had people, some of the characters 'round the place – had a chap called Sammy Dan, he used to do dry cleaning at home, and something you wouldn't get these days, if you had to go out at night he'd call before you went to work at seven in the morning and picked your suit up and he'd call back at half past five and deliver it back to you so you could go out to a dance or a show or wherever you were going. Also the next door belonged to O'Keefes. They were carriers. They started with horses and carts and then either the late '20s or early '30s they had two vans that were shaped like a packet of Lifesavers. One was painted like a pack of peppermint Lifesavers, the other was painted like a packet of cinnamon Lifesavers, a brown and white, and they travelled all over Australia with those, advertising Lifesavers. And every time they'd come back from a trip they used to have little sample Lifesavers and old Mrs O'Keefe'd hand me over a box of Lifesavers over the fence. And then later on, it was just before the war, they bought a couple of big Diamond T trucks and they had big tanks built under the bottom of them, one half for petrol and one half for water and they brought the first cattle over to the Royal Easter Show from Perth.

4.01 **SR: That's a long way to come, isn't it?**

HB: Yes.

SR: What was it like for kids?

HB: Very good, a lot of cricket, of course, played and, of course, the kiddies coming down the street in billy carts and then over under the tunnel here there in Coulson Street, that was Bakewell's Pottery and the horses and drays used to come down Devine Street with big lumps of coal and 'round under the tunnel to take the pottery and if a few lumps of coal didn't fall off, some kid'd get up on the back and knock a few lumps off and that kept us pretty well in coal for under the copper and for our fuel stoves.

SR: And where did they play cricket?

HB: Bakewell's paddock was just the other side of the railway line there, played cricket, but also at one stage they put a lot of sand on this end of it and you had a run-up – oh, it was about four foot high on the other part – and you

had a run-up on the sand. We built ourselves a running track and it'd be all right going down on each circuit but coming up the other way it was pretty hard. I remember we used to run – I remember one time we had the locals got another gang of kids, I think it was from St Peters, and they challenged us to a race over thirty two laps, which is about two or three mile and a mate of mine and myself went flat-out from the start and we got one lap up on the others and they never woke up to we had about two laps to go how far they were behind. Well, there was no way in the world they were going to catch us over that distance.

SR: And who were some of your mates?

5.59 HB: Oh, there was Reggie McLeod, Reggie and Vicky McLeod. The McLeods lived down on the corner of Macdonald Street and Amy Street. There were Johnny Wicks. Johnny Wicks lived over the road here. His stepfather was Joe Hill, better known as Joe Brooklyn; he was a well-known punch ball artist. He travelled with Sharman's show all over Australia and was on the Tivoli circuit as well. He'd keep about eight or nine punch balls going at the same time with his hands, his elbows, his knees, back and front of his knees, and his forehead and the both sides of his head and that.

SR: How big are these punch balls?

HB: The ordinary punch ball they used, I suppose about that size (demonstrates visually); the boxers use them for speedball and all that sort of thing.

SR: Do they fill them with air or sand?

HB: No, they're air. Actually, I remember he used to train up here at McQuillan's Gymnasium and when Benny Evans, the American, was out here and training one time Joe showed him how to use the balls, especially the speedball, and he just left him for dead. But I used to do a bit of punching myself and I was a bit sorry when Joe died; I don't know what happened to the punch balls, I wouldn't have minded them myself because Johnny wasn't interested.

SR: And what sort of neighbourhood was it, what sort of people lived around here in the '20s?

HB: Well, just ordinary working people, mostly ordinary working people.

SR: Where did your dad work?

7.55 HB: Dad worked at Grace Brothers [department store]. First of all dad worked at Grace Brothers but before that he'd been a painter and decorator. When I was born, dad was the City Mission Sunday school teacher at the Newtown City Mission under – who was it? – Mr Fermage was the City Missionary and I can't think of the other one but also he was an elder of St Enoch's Presbyterian Church up at Newtown - that's where I finished up getting married up there – and he was also a member of the Sydney Presbytery. As

a matter of fact, I can remember one of my first things that got me interested in charity was when I was about four they sent me around, collecting for the poor at Christmas and I believe they told me that I went 'round with a box "A penny for the poor". When I got back dad and Mr Fermage - or Mr Edgington was the other one - but they opened it and counted the money and of course when I went out the second time 'round I said "A penny for the poor and daddy opened it".

SR: And what did your friends' parents do, their fathers, where did they work?

HB: Well, old Friday McLeod, Reggie McLeod's father, he worked over here at the Austral Brick place, he was the pan man. The pan man - in those days the chaps would dig out the shale from in the pit. And then they had little trucks; they'd fill the trucks up and wheel them and tip them into a big truck that was on a rope and the pan man used to, when the truck was full he'd pull a lever, the truck'd come up and it'd empty into a pan and the pan'd grind the shale and clay to make the bricks out of.

10.09 **SR: Right. So you would remember here, say from probably about 1925 and 1925 you would have turned six, wouldn't you?**

HB: That's right, yes, at the end of '25. I was born in the 27th of December so to get my age all you had to do was take the 19 off the front.

SR: Was it a happy childhood here?

HB: Yes, it was pretty good. I had a barrow that all the other kids used to like. Dad had built it out of an oil drum and timber and that and a butter box – well, not a butter box, more a crate – and he'd made an engine for me with six wheels on and we'd get on that at the top of Devine Street and come down the hill and 'round the corner on it.

SR: What's that a photo of?

HB: It's a photograph taken at Erskineville School in 1928. The teacher was Miss Wilde and a chap brought the pony along to the school and we had our photographs taken on it.

12.10 **SR: Is that you?**

HB: Yes, that's me and that's - you know the main building in Bridge Street, the main two-storey building the school in Bridge Street. I don't know whether it's still there but behind that there used to be a little bit of a sort of a laneway you went down steps to and then there was a big shed there, a shed for the children to have their lunches. Well, that was taken at the back of that front building, right. I was always a favourite of Miss Wilde's. When I was seven I had five months off school for a mastoid operation and when I was eight I had eight months off school with a nervous breakdown through overstudy.

SR: Overstudy?

HB: Well, dad had taught me to read. I could read books like The Count of Monte Christo and the big – there was two twelve hundred and fifty page volumes of the original and I'd read that by the time I was three years of age.

SR: Three.

HB: M'mm.

SR: Gee.

HB: But then even with those - - -

SR: Did you understand it?

HB: Yes. Afterwards, although actually I repeated second class at school three years in a row, and then later on we moved up to Ryde and I was at Ryde School, come back to Camdenville and then went to Newtown Tech up here and I actually got my Intermediate about a week or two before my fifteenth birthday.

SR: But how did you learn to read that book at such an early age?

13.59 HB: Well, dad started me on reading very young and he drummed into me something I've always tried to pass onto the younger children, younger people now, is that "If you can read you can be anything you want" because once you've mastered reading and mathematics, of course, you can study anything at all but if you can't read properly, well, you've got no chance of studying whatever you want to.

SR: And did you choose to read that because you wanted to, because you enjoyed that book?

HB: Yes, I always enjoyed reading. A matter of fact, someone asked me in 1966, at ICI one of the girls asked me how many books I read a week and I've kept a check ever since then and up till the 5th of July this year which is the end of my reading year, in twenty eight years I'd read eighteen thousand, six hundred and twenty five books.

SR: Goodness.

HB: As a matter of fact, I've read a hundred and twenty three books in the last eight weeks.

SR: Gee. You don't have a TV then?

HB: I have a TV, I was given a TV when I retired but it broke down in '87 and I've never bothered to get it fixed since, although I've had offers of fixing it for free but I don't like TV myself because a lot of old movies I can

remember they cut to pieces. I remember seeing the Adventures of Marco Polo at the old Enmore Theatre when it belonged to [Bill] Szarka and it ran for four hours and when they put it on TV it ran for one hour with twenty minutes out for advertisements.

SR: Getting back to the childhood thing, you know how you had the nervous breakdown, were you just studying too hard?

16.07 HB: Yes, yes, it was trying to overload the mind too much.

SR: And what happened to you?

HB: I just had to take eight months off school and I was on - - -

SR: Rest.

HB: Well, for some years – matter of fact until I started to smoke and drink I used to be on nerve tonics all the time but after I was eighteen and started to have a smoke and have a drink I never had any trouble ever since then.

SR: And was it a happy life at home?

HB: Yes. Well, as I say, the brother was four years younger than myself and the sister two years younger than him and mum was – as I say, dad was religious and mum was a member of the Latter Day Saints Church. Matter of fact, she had me christened in that which, you know, the reorganised Latter Day Saints, that's the Mormon Church, and she had me christened in that. But I got away after mum died. Mum died when I was twelve when we were living at Ryde and after that I stopped going to church but I've always believed in the principles of doing anything you could to help people. When I was secretary of the bowling club at ICI we ran charity days for different charities and raised quite a lot of money for them.

SR: Did your father expect you to go to church?

HB: No. Dad never went that much himself in later years. Dad said "As long as you live the Christian life you don't necessarily need to go to church" because there's a lot of people go to church on a Sunday and then forget everything for the rest of the week.

18.00 **SR: That's odd, though: he was so involved in it earlier, yes.**

HB: A matter of fact, when he died dad had a very good collection of books. He had the Greek testaments and he had the Greek Septuagint so that he could understand them which I passed on to a city missionary and also we had a hundred and fifty year old Book of Common Prayer which I finished up passing onto St Andrew's Cathedral in town for their church historical section.

SR: And given that your father worked at Grace Brothers, what did he do there?

HB: He was in the bulk store down there.

SR: He was a storeman?

HB: Yes, at the bulk store.

SR: What was the impact of the Depression on your family?

HB: Well, that's what I say. Around about '28 or '29 dad got out of work and then we went up to Ryde and we took on a shop up in Church Street, Ryde - it was half mixed business and half library – but unfortunately there were too many people on the books that didn't pay and after mum died, she died more through worry, I think, than anything else of the way the business was going and after she died dad lost interest and got rid of it and come back down here and went on the pension.

SR: And how difficult was it surviving in the Depression years?

HB: Well, not that bad. I don't know whether – I've got it somewhere, I should have the card for what we used to get. You got a card – there it is.

20.04 You got a card. This was Henry Brown, thirty four and sixpence a week. That was for dad, myself and the brother and sister. What date was that? 1935 and you were allowed so much milk. R Jennings was the milkman; he had a place down in Alice Street. Rowland Dibble was the baker; they were up between Angel Street and the next street on this side of the road. Clark was the butcher; he was on the corner of Alice Street and King Street. And Derrin Brothers were the grocers; they were up on the corner of Wells Street. And you just got – as I say, the thirty four and sixpence was split up between the four of those.

SR: In the early years of the Depression they hadn't instituted that. How did you survive then? In like 1930 and 1931 I don't think they had - - -

HB: I'm not sure when the – well, as I say, mum died in '32. Well, at that stage we had the shop, of course.

SR: Right.

HB: Yes. Well, then when we come back down here, of course, we got the dole. But there were other things too, like for argument's sake as I say, we used to get that coal. Another time I made the front page of the [Daily] Telegraph with a photo.

22.02 They were cutting out the wood blocks. They always had wood blocks in the roads and then bitumen over them. Well, they started up here in King Street near St Peters Station, they were working there. They took the wood

blocks out and started concreting the highway and of course we used to go up there with our billy carts and get a load of the wood blocks and bring them down for under the copper and that and I had mine loaded up one day and the Telegraph come along and took a photo. They had how the children of Erskineville helped their parents to get the firewood for the copper and the next thing the coppers come down here and wanted to know what I was doing, stealing wood blocks. I said "Well, the fellow up there said they didn't want them"; evidently, when they were tarring the road they used to use the wooden blocks under it to heat the tar up. Anyhow, there was nothing said about it but I wasn't too happy with the Telegraph. Another time that people weren't too happy with it, over where the tip was, over at St Peters there in Ricketty Street the tip used to be there near the Central Brick and Tile place and someone built a greyhound training track down there. They used to have a chap on a pushbike used to pedal and the rabbit'd travel 'round on a rail. And I suppose at that time at the dogs at Harold Park they might get two or three thousand people but down there of a Sunday, of course, after a while there were bookmakers would get down there and people with hot dog stands and that and the Telegraph come down there.

24.06 There were twenty five thousand people down there, making a Sunday picnic at one time and of course when they drew attention to it the police banned it because they reckoned that it was illegal gambling going on.

SR: What year was that, do you know what years?

HB: That would, I suppose, been about '36, '37, something like that.

SR: What else did the kids do to sort of help their parents get by at that time?

HB: Well, there were a lot of things. We used to go over to the tip. They'd like for argument's sake: Pick-me-Up [sauce manufacturers]. If they got tins that the labels had come off they wouldn't bother relabelling them, checking to see what they were and relabelling them, they'd take them over to the tip. Well, if we were over there when they brought all that over we'd just grab those tins. And you might decide to have baked beans for breakfast, baked beans on toast and you'd open it up and find it was a tin of fruit jello or something but it all went down. And then another time we got some luminous paint we found over the tip and we went 'round Rose Bay and those areas, painting the people's numbers on their doors with luminous paint per sixpence a letter and another time we got a lot of red paint and we went 'round, painting people's letterboxes for a shilling a time to paint their letterbox and that. Another time we got a lot of long sticks and a lot of – the old tea chests used to be plywood and we got some of those and we cut out what we called "walking men" and you cut them out with sort of a round part and then a head and painted them and cut out four legs in a circle, put a nail through the centre and put a stick on them and we took them up to Newtown bridge just on Christmas time, painted them up and sold them as walking men for one and sixpence each.

26.19 **SR: Who made those?**

HB: Another mate and myself.

SR: And did you always do these things together, a bunch of mates together?

HB: Yes, some were on your own. There was a family down the street here and I don't know what had happened, I think the wife had died, but the chap had about five or six kids and we used to go and give them a hand. He used to do fret work and he'd teach us fret work and do mottos to hang up in the house and then he'd varnish them and he'd sell them. Well, we'd all hop in and give him a hand with that down there.

SR: And sell them for him?

HB: No, well, he'd sell them but we'd go down and give his children a hand to do them. But I remember one of the mottos was that "Today is the tomorrow we worried about yesterday and all is well". And, of course, as time went on we might get a job, it might last a day, it might last a week, but you'd go along wherever you could. I remember one place I worked at was a box factory belonging to an old German chap and his daughter. And I still remember that, 33 Fitzroy Street, Marrickville, and they used to get the old butter boxes had the name branded in the timber and I used to have to use a wood scraper and scrape all the name out and then either he or his daughter'd put it on a machine and sand it and then they'd sell the boxes again.

28.06 Well, I worked there for three quarters of a day and to my knowledge I held the record for two or three years because he used to advertise three days a week in the paper, it cost him about one and six for the ads, and most kids'd work there half a day and then they'd leave without him paying them anything and he'd have a different kid every day but I insisted on my one and six and he wasn't too happy about that at all.

SR: Gee, it's a wonder the word wouldn't go around that he wasn't paying.

HB: Oh, I think it did at the finish. But then another place over here in – what's the name of it, the street along the canal there, this side of the canal? Anyway, along there there was a place there, Australian Woodwall. What the chap had, he had a machine; you'd get logs and the machine'd cut sort of wood straw about an eighth of an inch wide and he'd put it into bales and then we'd go out in the yard when the weather was fine, put this woodwall in frames, pour concrete over them and that was our inside wall boarding. That was before these current types of wall boards come out. But we only worked there myself for the day. We started at seven in the morning and we went to put our coats on at five o'clock to knock off and he said "Oh, we work overtime till half past seven at night" and we'd be working on Saturday morning as well and we said "Ooh, good, overtime". He said "I do not pay overtime" so we did not work there any more.

SR: How old were you when you started working?

HB: First job I had was the year I left school. Just as I turned fifteen I got a job over the Christmas rush as a telegraph messenger boy at the Newtown Post Office. It was only supposed to be for a few days but the postmaster decided after I smashed up about five bikes in about three days he reckoned I wasn't cut out for telegraph messenger boy.

30.19 **SR: These other jobs that you were talking about a few minutes ago, were they jobs that you had as a kid before you left school or were after?**

HB: No, no, these were whatsaname. I worked at those two but I worked anywhere. I worked at Nellie's when they were down at Queen Street, Glebe, for about three years.

SR: But as a child what sort of jobs did you do?

HB: Before I left school you mean?

SR: Yes.

HB: I never did anything before I left school, as I say, but - - -

SR: Just making those things to sell?

HB: That and going over to the tip and getting wood in different things like that.

SR: Were you expected to do that? Did your parents expect you to go and scrounge coal and things from the tip?

HB: No. As I say, mum had died by the time I started on getting that but I'd mainly just pick up [break in recording] – yes, you'd do whatever you could to help get something for the family.

SR: Were your parents strict - was your mother strict?

HB: Well, they'd give us a smack if we played up or that but taking it all around we were taught right from the go that you had to do the right thing.

SR: And you would have been what, twelve when your mother died?

HB: Yes.

SR: How did that affect the family?

HB: Well, first of all while dad was selling in the shop I went and stayed with some friends down in St Peters, the Pickerings. Doris Pickering had been a Sunday school student of dad 'round the City Mission and I stayed with them. And then the uncle and aunt come here, Uncle George and Aunt Kate,

they came here and I moved in with them until dad sold the shop and come down here.

32.15 **SR: Meanwhile, what had happened with this house? Did your grandparents still live in this house?**

HB: No, no. While we were at Ryde there were some other friends of the family that lived in the house.

SR: And from what you can remember when your mother was alive and say before you went out to Ryde to the shop, can you remember what a typical working day was for your mother?

HB: Oh, it was only just more or less do the washing on Monday, do the ironing with the old fashioned irons on the top of the fuel stove on the …….. and cooking the meals and all that sort of thing. That was more the sort of work.

SR: Did she work long hours?

HB: I wouldn't say that long. And Friday night, of course, was always the late shopping in those days; you'd go up to Newtown Markets

SR: Tell me about the Newtown Markets.

HB: Well, the Newtown Markets, that's where the marketplace is up there but the old Newtown Markets, they had Cullen's where they had the ham and beef business, there was a place used to make homemade confectionery which you don't see these days, Bulgarian Rock - and what was it they used to use for the colds and that? I forget that but all these different homemade confectioneries they'd make. Rocky Road was another thing, Squirrel Candy; people'd take that for their colds.

34.04 Then there were places selling flowers. The bottom end of the markets, the furthest away from King Street, all along the bottom there were the fowls, fowls and ducks and that. You used to also go down to Paddy's Markets later on for fowls and you wouldn't get them killed in those days. They'd give you an old sugar bag with a hole cut in the bottom corner and stick the fowl or the duck's head through the corner of the sugar bag and you'd carry it home in the tram and everybody's be going crook at the chook or the duck having a peck at the people sitting on the seat beside you. And then at the finish up you'd get some of the tram guards that let you ride in the back driver's compartment of the tram so that you'd be out of the road and wouldn't worry other people with the fowls. And that was another thing we used to do too, the Depression, take a barrow down to Paddy's Markets. That was the vegetable market where the wholesale vegetables and fruit were sold and we'd go down there and pick up specks of fruit or things like that and also they'd trim the outside leaves of cabbages and cauliflowers and that and if you got down there just as they'd finished selling you could fill up a sugar bag full of cabbage leaves or cauliflower leaves or spinach leaves to bring home for the family. Or if you got onions and potatoes, if they fell out

of the bags on the floor, well they didn't bother about them so you'd pick them up and bring them home as well.

SR: How did you get down to Paddy's?

35.59 HB: Oh, we'd walk down. In those days they used to have a procession in Newtown every year and all the horses and drays and that and they'd have decorated floats but all the different places like Gartrell White's used to make Aeroplane Flour and then there were the jelly peoples and there was Sanitarium and they all had little sample packets and they'd throw them out off the floats as an advertisement in those days. And then with the big procession in town, the Eight Hour Day procession and that, we'd go down and they'd have all the decorated floats but we'd walk down to town to see the processions, so watch it from Hyde Park or somewhere like that.

SR: How long would it take you to get into town, walking?

HB: Oh, I suppose three quarters of an hour or something like that.

SR: Did you go with your brothers and sister?

HB: I'd go with some of the mates. But what we used to do, I mean the older ones of us when we got up around sixteen or seventeen, the older ones of us would take turns in piggybacking the younger children so they wouldn't miss out as well.

SR: How'd you get on with your – what was it – you had two brothers, was it?

HB: No, the brother and the sister.

SR: A brother and a sister. How did you get on with them?

HB: Oh, all right. The only time that it ever it looked like trouble – of course, when I was the only child, with dad being mixed up with the City Mission and the Presbyterian Church and everything and with my birthday being two days after Christmas I'd get all my presents at once and they'd take me into the front room and they'd sit me down and there'd be a circle of toys from all dad's friends and different ones in the church all around the room.

38.12 Well, of course, when my brother turned up that was bad for me because it meant it cut down the number of presents I got. And I remember one year - we used to have a fireplace in the front room – and while Gordon was still in his cot when he was very young I'd been given a big celluloid Father Christmas as a Christmas present and I got it too near the fire and it caught fire so I wasn't going to get burnt, I just threw it straight into my brother's cot. Luckily, mum grabbed it out but I mean dad always reckoned that I did it to get square on him for cutting down on my Christmas presents. But he got square on me later on. We were playing down the yard here one time. You know the way you'd get a condensed milk tin and open it and just leave

the flap out like. Well, he picked it up and threw it at me and cut me right across the nose here; I had a scar for donkey's years across the nose. They reckoned that was him getting square with me. We also, when the uncle was here we had a parrot. We used to have a shed in the backyard and we had this parrot in a big cage, Joey Brown, a galah, and he was a pretty good talker. You'd fill his water tin up and he'd keep an eye out of the corner of his eye until you turned around and then he'd tip the water over his beak and he'd say "Joey Brown spilt his water" and different things like that, really good he was.

SR: I'll go back to your parents working. Was your father happy in his work?

40.04 HB: Yes. Dad was always happy, whatever he was doing.

SR: And was he ever involved in union action or industrial action?

HB: No, as I say, he spent more of his time with religious work than anything else.

SR: Was he ever involved in the anti-eviction campaign of the 1930s?

HB: No, no. No, as a matter of fact the anti-eviction campaign, when I was seventeen I was interested. Although we owned our own home they were having a go for the Fair Rents Court and I met people like Charlie Dickie and different ones that were in the Communist Party at the time that were in the eviction riots and they persuaded me to join them at the time and give them a hand and I spent two years speaking every Friday night up at Short Street, Newtown and writing an article every week for the Workers Weekly and going 'round, collecting names on a petition and we finally got a Fair Rents Court in. But then later on I found that they weren't my cup of tea so I pulled out. As a matter of fact, after that campaign they put me on the state council of the Communist Party but I didn't agree some of the leaders, some of the things they said. Well, one of them told me straight out, he said "The party's always right even if we've got to start to work at …… and I said "Well, that's not for me" so I pulled out of it. And at a later stage when the Liberal Party was formed Jack McCarthy who was the secretary of the Labour League said "It's time someone from 'round here was in that in case people need help" so I joined the Liberal Party and finished on the state council of the Liberal Party.

42.04 **SR: And did you agree with the philosophy of the Liberal Party?**

HB: I believed in the philosophy of – my philosophy was if you were going to be a member of a party to try and bring ideas to the party that were going to help the people. When I say "the people", I don't mean just the Labor or the tradesmen but I mean the whole of the people, those who invest their money so that people can get work and that; I believe everybody's entitled to a fair thing.

SR: Most people around here would have been associated with the Communist Party or the Labor Party.

HB: Yes, that's right, yes.

SR: And it was actually people from those groups that recommended, "Look, we'd better have a local in the Liberal Party in case we need help"?

HB: Yes. Well, as I say, Jack McCarthy, he was the main one.

SR: Who's he?

HB: He was a mayor of Erskineville.

SR: Was he a Liberal person?

HB: No, no, he was the secretary of Lang Labor. As a matter of fact, up in front of the post office up here was McCarthy Square – that was named after Jack.

SR: That would have been in the 1940s when they thought you ought to join the Liberal Party?

HB: Yes, it was about 1948, something like that, I think it was.

SR: And were you able to give any help to locals?

HB: Yes. You see, the thing was that while the Labor Party was in, if the Labor Party was in and somebody had something that they wanted taken before a member of parliament Jack could introduce them.

44.02 Well, when Bob Menzies got in, if Jack brought anybody to me that needed help from one of the federal government departments, well I'd introduce them to somebody. It was a sort of mutual thing.

SR: So there was no enmity between you and the local Labor people?

HB: No, the only time I had trouble, I was working on a campaign here at one stage and I got a bashing on the ANZAC Day. Three no-hopers that wouldn't be seen working for any of the parties – they called themselves Communists – used an excuse to give me a bashing and I finished up – the Telegraph come out the next morning with something happened to Bob Menzies, something happened to Artie Fadden, someone threw eggs or something at Cocky Caldwell and I had the other quarter of the front page on my bashing.

SR: And they were just thugs?

HB: Yes. Well, as a matter of fact, it must have been a state election because Freddie Green was the local Labor member for the district here and on the

polling day I was over at Alexandria School and Freddie leans, "Listen", he said, "if you'd like a lawyer to sue those fellows", he said "we're prepared to give you one of our best lawyers". And I said "Forget it", I said, "they weren't political people", I said, "and even the Communist Party offered to pay me any expenses" but I said "No, forget it", I said "I know it wouldn't be – members of parties don't do that".

SR: Back to when you were a child, so we're looking at the latter half of the '20s and the '30s, what did you do for fun?

46.03 HB: Well, it cost you sixpence to go to the pictures and go to the pictures. At Christmas they used to have a free matinee, all the different picture shows and that. You'd go to St Peters one day and the Enmore Hoyts another day and Newtown Hoyts another day and all that and it only cost you sixpence to go up. Where the Police Boys' Club is in Erskineville Road now, that's one of my early memories. That was the old Victory silent picture show and when I was at Erskineville School when I was about seven or eight they took us, a party from the school, up there to the pictures. I don't know what the picture was but the thing that still sticks in my mind was one of the first Felix the Cat cartoons, 'Felix the Cat at the Circus', and old Felix all the time the elephant kept on putting his trunk in a tank of water and squirting Felix and Felix got squirted. At the finish he got the fire hose and stuck it in the elephant's trunk and turned it on and the elephant exploded and he nearly drowned, pool old Felix. But that was, first of all it was the Victory Theatre, then they used it as a stadium, fighting and wrestling, then they made it the Hub number two and I saw pictures like 'Holiday' with Bing Crosby and that there and then later on they turned it into the Police Boys' Club.

SR: Did you go to the cinema often?

HB: Oh, fairly often, yes.

48.00 **SR: And what else did you do?**

HB: Well, later on, as we got a bit older there were a couple of mates and myself used to go - when the vaudeville was on, as I say, at the Victory Theatre or when it was on at the Majestic Theatre we'd go there. See, you could go in the Majestic; you could go upstairs in the Gods for sixpence so nearly every Saturday night we'd be up in the Gods up there. You'd have Mo one week, you'd have Ike …….. another week, you'd have George Wallace another week, you'd have Mike …….. and Queenie Paul another week. I saw Argus the Boy Wonder, the fellow that used to tell what a person had or something like that in their pockets. We had ……. the Magician with his little midgets, saw all those shows up there at the Majestic.

SR: As a kid?

HB: Yes. Well, no, a bit later on.

SR: And most of the kids in the neighbourhood could afford to go to the pictures?

HB: Yes. Well, I mean, if your parents weren't working you'd go 'round and you'd collect empty beer bottles and in those days the bottleohs would give you about thruppence a dozen for empty beer bottles or you'd go and pick up empty lemonade bottles and that which you got a penny each for. And, I mean, if you got two or three shillings worth of bottles, well you reckoned you was a millionaire.

SR: Where did you go to school?

HB: Well, I started at Erskineville, then I went to Ryde and then I come back from Ryde to Camdenville School for about six months and then I got my …… and went to Newtown Tech, which is the Newtown Performing Arts School now.

50.11 **SR: And what was it like at the Erskineville School?**

HB: Very good. It's always been a very good school. My father went there. It was known as Macdonaldtown School and Peter Board was the headmaster – he became the first director of education. And the funny thing about it, the coincidence, when I went to Newtown Tech Drummond was the headmaster there and later on he become the director of education.

SR: How big were the classes and what were the teachers' attitudes to you?

HB: They were very good, the teachers, I found. I couldn't tell you just how many at Erskineville now but I know at Newtown Tech I've still got their yearbook for the second last year I was there and I think there was about forty two in each class. And the funny thing about it, with forty two in the class we did better there than what the kids do these days; I mean, I don't know what's wrong. But there was Carrick, there was Berkinshaw and those people – there was only one teacher I couldn't get on with. We had one teacher, he was an ex-German major from WWI – I won't mention names – but he was our maths teacher in the final year. And there was Bob Bamber and myself – Bob was a mate of mine – we got into ……. with him and he wouldn't have us in his class for the last six months before the Intermediate Certificate.

52.05 And as soon as he'd come in he'd send us out of the class. Well, we used to sit down with our textbooks and read and when the Intermediate Certificate came out we were the only two in the school that got an A in maths, which is very satisfying.

SR: Yes, I bet it was. What sort of methods of discipline were used at Erskineville when you were in the primaries?

HB: Oh, you'd just get a bit of a hit with a cane, that was all, 'round the legs mostly.

SR: Are there any big events that you can remember? What were the big events for the kids?

HB: Well, the year that the Duke and Duchess of York come out here to open parliament house in Canberra we were all given a magazine 'We Dukes the Duke', with photos of the present queen and her sister and the royal family. There was the sesquicentenary in 1938; somewhere I've still got the booklet that they brought out in 1938.

SR: So they'd be public events. What about local events? Did you ever have sports carnivals, did you swim?

HB: No, that's one thing, I could never swim, I was never a swimmer but I used to go in the school sports and that. Mainly walking was my best thing. I had a cousin, Fred Daintry I went to school with, well his brother, elder brother, Tom Daintry, they lived down St Peters and Tom Daintry was the Australian half mile walking champion and Freddie used to train with him.

54.04 Well, in the school walk at Newtown Tech there was one kid there that had him as a favourite for the half mile walk and I think Freddie beat me by about fifty yards and I think I beat the favourite by about thirty yards, he's the third place.

SR: Were your family close by? It sounds like you had a lot of relatives in the area.

HB: Well, in those days, like the Daintrys lived down St Peters. Aunt Emily was a member of the Sunshine Club and they used to take children from these districts out for a picnic. I remember they took us to Clontarf one time with a Sunshine picnic and you see that mole I've got there, well, I got a tick in there and when they took it out that mole come up. But there were quite a lot. There was one aunt lived out at Botany, then there was the Durys lived down at Manly. When I came here after mum died, Aunt Will was mum's sister and she took Gordon and Irene for a couple of years until Gordon got old enough to work but Irene stayed with her until she got married.

SR: And you stayed with your father?

HB: Yes, I stayed with dad.

SR: The family were split up.

HB: Yes, yes, more or less.

SR: How did that affect your relationships?

HB: Well, I mean to say, well, I still whatsaname. When dad died and left me the place, he said in the will that he knew that I'd do the right thing with the family.

56.00 Well, when I took this place over it was worth three hundred and fifty pound, which is seven hundred dollars and at the present time, what with the house, the value of the house and what I've got invested in one thing and another the family'll get – when I'm gone the family'll get about three hundred and twenty five thousand, so I think I've done the right thing by the family as far as what dad wanted me to do.

SR: Yes, sounds like it. When you were at home, what was a typical meal, what sort of food were you eating in the '20s?

HB: Well, just normal foods. I mean, there were times like when things were a bit tough, we had the old fuel stove and you could buy the fresh best of mutton for about a penny a pound and we always reckoned it was a terrific thing to get the fresh best of mutton, get the hot coals in the fuel stove, take the top off and it had a grid about that size (demonstrates visually) that you'd put over the place, stick the mutton on and it'd barbeque it. And you made your toast over it like that too, better than all these mechanical things.

SR: Did you eat a lot of fruit and veg?

HB: We'd grow things like spinach and rhubarb, we'd grow them ourselves. Well, we had ……, we had figs, the people down the back had a pomegranate tree and we had radishes and all that growing and a nectarine tree.

58.09 **SR: What smells can you remember of Erskineville, what are the smells that you can remember?**

HB: Well, the main thing was from the pottery over here and the brickyard. They used to salt the kilns at the pottery. When they were putting the glaze on the earthenware pipes, water pipes, they'd salt the kilns and it let a certain amount of chlorine in the air. But dad always reckoned that that was a good thing for the district because when the pneumonic flu hit just after WWI – I think it was about 1919 – Erskineville had a lower death rate than practically every other suburb in Sydney. And people had to wear a mask – I had one for years –wore a mask with a couple of loops on it and if you were going out to the zoo or anywhere where there was a crowd of people you had to wear one of them; it was compulsory. But dad always reckoned it was the chlorine in the air from salting the kilns that more or less purified the air in Erskineville.

SR: What particular sights can you remember, what images stick in your brain?

HB: Well, the sesquicentenary. We all went down the Domain on the night of the big celebrations there and over on Kirribilli Point they had a big frame set out in fireworks with a picture of – I can't remember who it was – but one of the royal couples who'd come out, they had a thing in fireworks, a colour picture of them.

60.02 And they had the Sussex, the British battleship, the Sussex, anchored in Farm Cove, they had a big pontoon there with a band on and there were a quarter of a million people around. They opened the walk around the gardens wall and there were a quarter of a million people that saw the big concert there that night, I think which is the biggest concert we've ever had in Australia.

SR: Who was performing at that concert?

HB: Oh, I wouldn't know now, it's that many years. But one I do remember, the Sussex had a song they used to play, their band used to play 'Sussex by the Sea' but all of the people could hear it quite well because the water acted as a sort of a music shell.

SR: It sounds like that you went into the city to all the big events. And how would you get in there – tram?

HB: No, walk most of the time. We'd walk out to Botany pier for a day's fishing or we'd walk out to La Perouse. We used to go to Pussycat Bay – that's at La Perouse – for a day's fishing. And in the hot weather, more than once in hot January or February nights if it was too hot to sleep there'd be half a dozen of us'd go for a walk out to Bondi Beach.

SR: Bondi?

HB: Yes, and have a sleep on the grass above the promenade out at Bondi - - -

SR: That's a long walk.

HB: - - - and we'd walk home in the morning. Well, that's not long. I mean, I remember one time a fellow called Joey Waldron and meself, we heard there was some work up at Bathurst, fruit picking, and we started off from here, we were going to hitchhike up to Bathurst, and we walked from here up to just on Penrith – it was about thirty mile from here – and it started to pour rain, we couldn't …… and we walked home. Well, we got back home at eleven o'clock at night, so that was sixty miles we did in eleven hours.

62.11 But there was another thing, like one of the things I did before school. Bluey Fairbank, his father and his uncle used to deliver the Newtown Daily – that used to be delivered three days a week. [break in recording]

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Tape 2 Side 1

HB: Bowls was my best game.

SR: Interview with Henry Brown, 3rd of September 1994 at Erskineville, tape 2. The sounds, any sounds that you remember from the '20s around Erskineville, any distinctive sounds?

HB: Mainly the steam trains.

SR: What sound would they make?

HB: Well, coming up the hill there from St Peters Station you'd get the old steam engine pulling a heavy load the sounds as "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can" and then when they got up and started going a bit downhill to Erskineville they'd sound "I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could"; that was the old steam trains. Another couple of things I remember too was there used to be a steam tram used to run from Kogarah Station, it'd run out through Sans Souci and Sandringham and then back again, and it'd leave Kogarah Station, run onto the railway line and run for about a hundred yards along the railway line, then it'd turn and go up a hill.

64.07 Well, if it was a public holiday and there was a big crowd on the tram and especially if it had been raining it'd have to back down onto the railway line and get another good go at it again and half the crowd'd have to get off and walk up the hill. There was also a steam tram from Sutherland to Cronulla in those days too. We used to go for our holidays when mum was alive; just to the side of where the loop was at the Cronulla Beach there was an old Scotchman had a duck farm there and he had an old steam tram carried you in the backyard and we'd hire that for a week for a Christmas holiday and we'd sleep in the old steam tram; that was our bedroom.

SR: It must have been a lot of fun down there.

HB: Yes. And watching the old Scotchman kill the ducks for Christmas and throw them into tubs of water to soften the feathers and then we'd give him a hand to pluck them and that.

SR: Can you remember any local characters, any identities around the place?

HB: Yes. Can I tell you a bit about the Newtown Daily?

SR: Yes.

HB: Yes. Well, as I say, Bluey's father and uncle used to deliver it and we'd give them a hand and then when they got paid Friday night they'd take us to a milkbar up there near Newtown Markets and buy us ice cream sodas - you don't often see them now. They'd put the syrup in and then they had the soda fountain, they'd pull a lever and the soda water'd come out into it and they'd put an ice cream in it and it'd all fizz up. But then later on when Bluey's uncle died and then his father died, we took the Newtown Daily over.

66.05 Well, it was always a spare time job for us, it was always money we could make between like if we were out of work and we kept that right through till, oh, about 1940, kept that as a three day a week job. We had from down at

the bridge over the railway line down near the Town and Country, along the railway line to Redfern Station and then all around that area around Darlington and everything like that, down by the hospital, all around Camperdown, back up the back streets, Bedford Street and that in Newtown, and then down Enmore Road, down Liberty Street and 'round, working our way 'round to Enmore Park again, we had the whole of that territory we used to do three days a week so we were pretty fit.

SR: What were you going to say about local characters – did you know any?

HB: Well, as I say, there was that Sammy Dan, the chap used to do the whatsaname, the cleaning.

SR: What did he do?

HB: He'd pick up your clothes in the morning and bring them back at night.

SR: Yes, yes.

HB: There was – I won't mention names because some of the families might object – but just call him "Alf". Alf was a bloke that he had about four or five kids. He was very clever but he didn't like work but he could do anything with his hands and he had a pushbike, swapped it for a motorbike that wouldn't go and got the motorbike going. Then he finished up at one stage, he swapped it for about a 1918 Rolls-Royce that wasn't going and we used to all go up and collect our dole in the Rolls-Royce until the fellow up here at Erskineville reckoned that wasn't the way to come and collect the dole.

68.17 But you only got about eight mile to go and so he finished up he swapped it straight back for a pushbike. But the same chap another time – he was in one of those little houses in Flora Street – and he had no furniture in the kitchen, so he got a box for a table and he knocked a couple of lengths of water pipe through the wall and put a plank on for the kids to sit on to have their meals and the fellow next door complained that his kids were hurting themselves on the end of the pipes because it come through into his kitchen. So all Alf did was hand him over a hacksaw over the fence and says "Cut the ends off, mate, if it's hurting your kids". And then another time he moved into one of these places down in the Vulcan Terrace down there the bottom of Campbell Street, St Peters. They were all empty at the time and he lived there for about six months until there was a knock on the door one day. And he used to always send his wife to the door and he said "Who is it, Ruby?" She said "It's the landlord". He said "What's he want?" "He wants some rent". He said "The hide of him", he said. "To think I've been staying here all this time, stopping the kid from mucking his place up and breaking it down and he wants me to pay for it too".

SR: Were a lot of places vacant in the Depression around here?

HB: Yes, they were. Well, Alf had a good lurk. You know, a lot of the landlords wouldn't let you have a place unless you could show them rent receipts. So Alf had it all worked out: he'd buy a rent receipt book which only cost him about sixpence and he'd write out twelve months' receipts and then he'd get the 'Blackitt' that they used on the stoves, you know, the timber 'Blackitt' and he'd get a paintbrush and he'd sprinkle very lightly, heavier, heavier, heavier, heavier, going right back and that was the fly dirt on them and then he'd sprinkle a bit of dirt over it to make like the older ones look a bit dirtier and then he'd get a spike and he'd push them on and off a few times to show that they were used and then he'd take them up and show them that he'd been a good payer for the last twelve months.

70.53 **SR: And then what would happen when he'd get into a place?**

HB: Well, then he'd be there for two or three months and wouldn't pay any rent and he'd get thrown out, have to get somewhere else to go to.

SR: Are there any other sorts?

HB: Well, there was another family that they were living up here in Devine Street in these little cottages up here, and they got thrown out for not paying the rent and they got a place down in Wells Street and it had no doors on the individual rooms so they come back here and collected the doors off the place they'd moved out of, cut them down to fit the other place down there and then they got chucked out of there and the doors weren't big enough for the other place they went to then. But there were all sorts of characters. There was another chap used to drink methylated spirits and the police'd pick him up and take him out – I wouldn't mention his name because he had a pretty prominent family – but the police'd pick him up periodically and take him out to the bay (slang for Long Bay gaol?] when they wanted some landscaping.

72.06 He was an exceptionally good gardener and he'd be out there for say three or four months and then they'd let him out and he'd come back and stay with his sister for a while and be dressed up and then he'd leave his good clothes and he'd get his old clothes on and he'd be back on the metho and sleeping in the brickyards of a night in the warm ashes and that.

SR: And he just preferred that lifestyle, did he?

HB: Yes, yes, he liked methylated spirits.

SR: Were there any people that you weren't allowed to play with as a kid?

HB: Oh, no, we were pretty ……. …… There were two or three rough lots. There was one family; there was one family that they nearly caused a child to get drowned. They used to go 'round and get the iron grates out of the sewers, out of the gutter, they'd get them and break them up and sell them to Sims' for scrap metal and they took one, the one up here at the bottom of Devine Street, and it was heavy rain and a little baby nearly got washed

down the drain at the end of it and after that the council got shrewd and they put a sort of a metal staple thing in the footpath and put a chain around so that they couldn't get them off. There was another crowd; they used to call them "the rowdies". They lived down the street here and they was always having a fight and the police come down one day and went in there to see if they could arrest them. One of the policemen came tearing out. He said "If they're going to start throwing crockery I'll start throwing bullets" and he went back in and when they come out with two or three of them arrested they couldn't drive them away, couldn't put them in the police car because one of the kids had got a couple of seven inch nails and driven into each of their four tyres.

74.15 And, as I say, there were different characters 'round the place. There was another chap that lived up the street. He was always only a very short chap and he'd wanted to be in the police force but he wasn't big enough but he was always very authoritative until he walked into a place up here in Devine Street where a man and his wife were having an argument and tried to get in between them. And the fellow was bashing his wife and finished up when he went to pull the husband away the wife turned 'round and hit him over the head with the side of an axe. So that stopped him from – didn't hurt him very badly but that stopped him interfering any more after that.

SR: So as a kid you were pretty free to roam around the areas, wherever you wanted to go?

HB: The only thing I used to get cranky about, I always got the blame. We'd go for a walk over the aerodrome, because in those days you could wander through the hangars and everything like that. I mean, there was Clancy the Skybaby that the Clancy Brothers built, was a little monoplane and that with a motorbike engine. When Bert Hinkler landed we went over there and had a look over his plane, Amy Johnson's plane, Kingsford Smith's plane; actually, I was in hospital when Kingsford Smith landed but I often used to have a look at the Southern Cross. And when they built the Gannet monoplane - that was the one that used to fly from Sydney to Newcastle, flew for years and never had an accident – but it used to carry nearly as many people as a Douglas DC-2 and it was designed by wing commander Wackett, built at Mascot and it only had two two hundred horsepower engines as against the Douglas with its two two thousand horsepower engines.

76.15 But they never, ever built another one and I don't know why. In my opinion, it was superior in every way to the imported ones but that was built at Mascot.

SR: So you would wander over to the airport. And where else would you go?

HB: Well, one more thing while we're on the airport. When they made Mo's picture 'Strike me Lucky', Reggie McLeod and myself had wandered over to the airport there and Goyer Henry was a famous pilot in those days, stunt

pilot, and they had him, supposed to land in the plane and he was coming in and sideslipping like that (demonstrates visually) and we didn't see the plane but we saw the movie camera. So we started running across to the movie cameras and the next thing the mate says "Down", and we dived down and the plane just sort of skimmed over us. Well, they left that scene in the picture but the lousy so and sos wouldn't even give us a free pass to go and see it. We reckoned that was real bad, that, yes. I think it was one of Ken Hall's pictures, that, yes.

SR: How old were you?

HB: Oh, we were about sixteen, seventeen at the time.

SR: And you didn't see the plane coming?

HB: No, no, just at the last minute their mate caught us onto it and of course we went flat. Well, of course, they left it in the picture; that was a good thing. Another time when I was about eighteen I got in with a chap. He used to do panel beating and he used to give me I think it was around about a pound a week or something like that and my lunch and my cigarettes through the day to give him a hand with panel beating.

78.06 If we found a commercial traveller or a doctor, someone who couldn't afford to have their car off the road and it had a dent in it we'd follow him 'round and while he was making his calls we'd panel beat it out at the side of the road. And when they were making, when George Wallace's picture 'Gone to the Dogs' was being made they were making it out at Cinesound Studios at Eveleigh Street – that was one of Ken Hall's – and he had a dent in his mudguard and we beat out the dent while he was filming and then he took us in and showed us some of the scenes being made.

SR: Who was that?

HB: Ken Hall. And there was a haunted house scene in it and the fellow walks along the floor, then he walks up the wall, then he walks across the ceiling, down the other wall and they were filming that when we were in the studio. And they had it on a swivel and they'd film walking across the floor, then they'd stop the camera. Then they'd tilt it 'round and the camera 'round and then he'd walk up the wall. Then they'd tilt it 'round again and he'd walk across the ceiling and they'd tilt it to the other one. And there was a little dog in it, a little Scottish terrier, and I was going to sue Ken Hall; he nearly took a piece out of me, he did.

SR: The dog did?

HB: Yes, just nipping my heel, you know. But that was quite interesting, that, because a lot of people couldn't afford to have their car off the road.

SR: You followed them around and did the panelbeating?

79.53 HB: Yes. And of course in those days – you can't do it now but in those days they used to do a layer of grey primer and then a layer of duco, they'd have about three or four coats of primer and duco. Well, if we saw somebody who had a scratch on the car, say a black car with a scratch and you could see the grey primer through it, he'd send me into the local shop and we'd get monkey soap and we'd cut back with the monkey soap to the next coat of black and we got that good at the finish we could sort of take it out so that you wouldn't be able to see – it wouldn't need respraying, you wouldn't see where the scratch had been in it. But of course nowadays it's only a baked enamel, they only put one coat on like.

SR: Where did most people in this area work?

HB: Oh, that'd be hard to say. I mean, people got wherever they could get at those days. As I say, I worked at those couple of places I worked at. In those days I worked at Malley's, I worked at Bruce and Berg's Plastic Moulding, I worked at Daubman's Plastic Moulding down in Eveleigh Street, I worked at – might have been then and a bit later on – I worked at the Bradford Cotton Mills, I worked at Bond's, I worked at Alexandria Spinning Mills.

SR: You had a lot of jobs. Did most people move around a lot?

HB: Well, see, you'd get a job – I worked at Cook's Caramels.

SR: What years are we talking? You're talking about the '30s here?

HB: Yes, well the late '30s and then of course after the war. But I worked at Cook's Caramels about 1939 for a couple of weeks for the Christmas rush and that.

82.09 **SR: But nobody put you on full time, was that the situation?**

HB: Yes, a lot of it. Well, actually though the dole people sent me to Marchant's [soft drink manufacturer] to get a week's work for the Christmas rush and the bloke at Marchant's told me that I couldn't smoke in the place and I told him that if as far as I was concerned that wherever I went I smoked, so he knocked me back so I worked 'round the corner and got the job for Christmas at Cook's Caramels instead, which was a better paying job.

SR: What about in the '20s, what did your mate's fathers do?

HB: Oh, well old Joe Hill - as I say, that was Joe Brooklyn – he was a - - -

SR: ……

HB: - - - he was on the stage and everything but he also, his main job, he was a bootmaker, ……. …….. and there were quite a few worked on the railway. There were a few worked on the council and then there were jobs like at – a lot of the women worked over at Vickers.

SR: Did the women work in the '20s?

HB: Yes. Well, a lot of women worked at Vickers, Alexandria Spinning Mills, …….. place out at Lord Street, Botany.

SR: Is this in the '20s or in the '30s after the Depression started?

HB: Well, I'd say mainly the '30s.

SR: Because women could get work in the '30s but the men couldn't.

HB: Yes. Well, see, as I say, they were always, the mills was always a job for women. Matter of fact, later on after the war, as I say, I worked at Bradford and I worked as intermediate shift manager for about six months over at the ingot mills over at Rosebery and most of the girls, thirty-odd girls working under me there, but most of the girls that worked there were either school teachers or housewives.

84.26 I worked from three till eleven but the girls worked from five till ten, you know, just to get a bit more money for the household and that.

SR: And that was in the Depression?

HB: No, this was later on. But in the Depression, as I say, you'd get whatever you could get.

SR: And why were teachers working there?

HB: Well, this was later on; it was after the war when I was at the ingot.

SR: But women teachers weren't being paid enough that the one job would do them?

HB: Well, as I say, that was about – when was that? – it was about '48 I went to that job but the reason they'd be working, of course, was helping to pay for a home or something then.

SR: Well, back in the '20s and the '30s when you were a child, was it a safe neighbourhood?

HB: Well, put it this way: we used to go 'round, as I say, three days a week with the Newtown Daily and Bluey's father and uncle went 'round before us and we'd start about eleven o'clock at night and work till four in the morning around all these districts here and it was quite safe to do it. As I say, we'd walk out to Bondi and sleep on the beach of a night or on a hot night we might all go down to Enmore Park, a team of us, and lay down there for the night on the grass and you were quite safe.

86.04 **SR: Well, did you hear much about housebreak-ins – did you leave your doors open, for example?**

HB: Well, Bluey Fairbanks' place never had a lock on the front door until about the '50s, that's how safe it was. Matter of fact, you'd go 'round at Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve with the Newtown Daily and 'specially around Enmore and that you'd be lucky to get all your papers delivered because everywhere you went someone'd say "Oh, mum, it's the Daily man" and everywhere you went you'd get invited in for a drink.

SR: Was your father much of a disciplinarian?

HB: Well, as I say, he expected us to do as we were told, we were taught to do as we were told but there was no bashing or anything like that.

SR: And obviously you had a lot of freedom to wander around?

HB: Yes. Well, as I say, we'd walk out to go for fishing out to Botany pier or those places.

SR: Mr Brown, is there anything else that you'd like to say? I don't know if I've left anything out or anything I should have asked you.

HB: Well, as I say, I'm not sure, I've never been sure whether Wyndham Street, Alexandria was named after the grandfather's Wyndham Estate or whether he named the estate after whatsaname but my father was born - do you know Wyndham Street at all?

SR: No.

HB: That's the first street off Botany Road on Henderson Road.

SR: Yes.

87.53 HB: What's the name of that? - the Lord Raglan Hotel's on the corner. Well, just alongside the Lord Raglan's a lane, laneway goes down into the middle of the block and it was just down that laneway there used to be a two-storey house; that's where dad was born, there, in there. But there were all sorts of people 'round the place. But a friend of mine I worked with at ICI, his grandmother lived in the street back from Mitchell Road behind the Parkview Hotel and somebody broke into her place and messed the place up and pinched a few things and two of the local hard men, Limerick and Nigger Fox, they just passed the word 'round that if the stuff wasn't back within a week that they hoped their funeral fund was paid up because …… …….. and all the stuff came back again.

SR: But what do you mean by the "hard men"? Is it Knicker Fox and who else?

HB: Nigger Fox. Well, Nigger Fox finished up, he - - -

SR: Did you say "Nigger" or "Knicker"?

HB: Nigger, Nigger Fox they used to call him. He was a bit of a bookie and that. He opened up the door one night and someone blasted him with a shotgun later on. He lived in Mitchell Road. But, I mean, if anybody – in those days, especially around these districts – if anybody hit a woman or a child, well they'd have a good chance of finishing in hospital themselves because there were a lot of hard cases but they wouldn't allow anybody to interfere with children or women.

SR: Who was this other one, not Fox, the other one, who was the other one that was the hard - - -

HB: Limerick.

SR: Limerick?

HB: I'd rather than say what his name was because he's a very prominent, pretty wealthy man but that was his nickname, Limerick.

90.03 **SR: How did he make his money?**

HB: Oh, nightclubs and all, Limerick was in.

SR: Sly grog?

HB: No, no. And I think that's about all. There was a two-up school in the Depression, ran for about four years down the corner here. There used to be a corner, Pike's, Mrs Pike's shop, and they had an awning 'round it but they used to play two-up there day and night, rain or shine; if it was raining they'd get under the awning and just go out the toss. And the police'd come down every now and again and the mob'd disappear but the day they disappeared the quickest was a fellow, a big fellow called Col, had an argument with the local SP bookie, dived in the back of Pike's shop and come out with an axe and the mob disappeared about three times as fast as if the police were there. And another incident I remember from those days: there was a girl ……. down here, she was captain of the local vigoro team and they had a ball, just after the war started, it was, they had a ball up at Newtown Town Hall and we all went up there to the dance. And there was one fellow, Reggie, always fancied himself with the women and about halfway through the night there's a big blonde walked in, lovely blonde in a big white dress and everything and Reggie hooked onto this blonde and he's telling everybody, boys and girls, "I'm right, I'm taking her home, blah, blah" and going on about how well he's going and just before the final dance the MC got up and introduced Mr Dickie Spring, female impersonator at Jim Gerald's AIF show and Reggie was on the next tram and we never saw him for a fortnight, yes.

92.19 But as I say there was always these characters 'round the place that everybody knew them but I mean nobody'd think of robbing a working man, you know. I remember one time they robbed the Bank of New South Wales up here but it was done in a clever way which people never got hurt. There was a holiday weekend coming up and there was an empty shop next door to

it, so they took the empty shop, they whitened the windows over so that people couldn't see how they were preparing the shop and that and in the weekend they just went straight through the wall into the strong room and got all the money in the strong room and went away and they were never heard of since.

SR: Were they locals who did that?

HB: Well, nobody knows but, as I say, nobody was hurt of course so they never had [break in recording]

SR: What year was that?

HB: I think that was about '37 or '38. There was another one at the same time that wasn't here but another one that people never got their backs up so much about because of nobody getting hurt was the Cockatoo Dock robbery.

94.00 They used to drive the money to a wharf there near the Iron Cove Bridge and they'd put it on a launch and take it over to the Cockatoo Dock. Well, all they did, somehow or other they got the fellows off the launch and as soon as the money went on the launch off they went with it. But, you know, nobody was hurt in that. Well, people weren't so worried about it if people never got hurt or that in those days.

SR: Well, I'd like to thank you for your time, Mr Brown.

HB: Yes.

SR: It's been very interesting.

HB: Do you reckon you've got something worthwhile out of it?

SR: Yes, I really do, that's great. O.K, thank you very much.

HB: O.K. (sings) "There is a land beneath the Southern Cross blessed by the wattle and the waratah, grand as the rock within its desert heart; it's the land of the Southern Star. Land of the emu and the kangaroo, land of the dreamtime of its first dark sons, enriched with cultures now from many lands, our greatness has just begun. Washed by the waters of the bluest seas, girt by its beaches with their golden sands, gift of our God for all eternity, Australia, the promised land. Gift of our God for all eternity, Australia, our promised land".

SR: Very good. (applause)

Interview ends