CITY OF SYDNEY

ORAL HISTORY

COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Mick Green

INTERVIEWER: Sue Rosen

DATE: 28 March 1995

PLACE: Beaconsfield

0.00 **SR:** **- - - ******** Beaconsfield, 28th of March 1995.**

Mick, when were you born?

MG: I was born in Manchester in the United Kingdom. My father was an Australian who was sent to England in WWI as a munitions chemist and while he was over there he met my mother. That's why I was born in England and she was in London but her family were in Birmingham. Then when the war finished he was repatriated back to Australia and she followed him out later with me.

SR: And what year were you born?

MG: ******** 1926.

SR: And were you born at – where?

MG: Across the road. At Crown Street Hospital and we were living across the road.

SR: So you weren't born at home?

MG: No.

SR: No. Did you have brothers and sisters?

MG: Two sisters, both older than I am, one by seven years and the other by five.

SR: And what are your earliest memories of Beaconsfield?

MG: Children playing with children, dozens of them; there were children all over this street and all over the next street up, Queen Street. Marbles, playing marbles; football out there in the street.

SR: Was it safe then to play in the streets?

MG: Yes, because there wasn't many motor vehicles. A lot of lorries, a lot of horse-drawn lorries and carts and things like that. There were cars but not many. If we were playing cricket we'd grab the wicket and run off the road and then bring it back.

SR: So when do your earliest memories go back to, what years would you be talking about there when you remember the marbles?

MG: Oh, goodness. I remember going to the kindergarten here on the corner of Collins Street and Queen Street; it was the Bluebird Kindergarten, so that was pre-school and there was a lot of children going to that place.

SR: Do you know who ran that, who ran that kindergarten?

MG: Yes, the Kindergarten Union. I found that out later in life, but it was the Kindergarten Union.

2.04 **SR: They set up quite a lot of kindergartens. Did people have to pay fees or were they - - -**

MG: Well, at that time people didn't have money - - -

SR: Yes.

MG: - - - and I think that they parents would reciprocate by helping with the lunches and cleaning the kindergarten and seeing everything was all right. There may have been a small fee but I don't remember and I certainly don't believe that there was one; I think the councils used to help them, the local municipal councils. I could be wrong but I think that's the way it went.

SR: Yes, because at that time there wasn't much money around.

MG: Very, very little.

SR: Well, what kind of a house did you live in?

MG: Here it is.

SR: So you're living in the same – you came to this house when you were - - -

MG: Two years of age or eighteen months of age.

SR: And it stayed in the family all that time?

MG: All the time.

SR: Gosh. So this is a single-storey terrace, semi, isn't it?

MG: Yes, yes, it is a terrace, people on both sides, common walls on both sides.

SR: And how many bedrooms?

MG: Two.

SR: Two. And your family, you were only three children.

MG: Three children.

SR: Well, what kind of a place was Beaconsfield for kids in say the early '30s?

MG: Poor but very happy, they were all happy, the kids. They certainly didn't have much money but they found things to do. As I say, the football, we played – I played football for many years with a local team, junior football, the Carringtons, and they're still playing in the South Sydney Junior competition. And just down the street was a man named Teddy Green and he'd been an Australian champion boxer, friend of my family for many, many years, and at a very young age – I think I was four – he took me to a little gymnasium he had in Queen Street.

4.19 It had been a Catholic church and there was an upper part and a lower part. It was built on a hill and there was a top part that we used to use. The people didn't like it but the people that lived in the area used it as a dance hall on a Saturday night; it was a get-together locally; I mean, everybody used to go there to dance. I remember I went there and learned to dance with my mother and sisters, that type of thing. But underneath he had the gymnasium and I spent a lot of time there and I was only very young, four years of age, five years of age, no more than five when I first went there with him, yes.

SR: Well, what kind of a kid were you?

MG: An average kid for around the Redfern, Alexandria way: always in trouble of some description but not serious trouble, you know. But, no, that was more

– they were sports minded. I mean, as I say, they'd get a football and kick it around the street or they'd grab a cricket bat and ball and they'd be playing out in the street or where the Beaconsfield Park is now there used to just be a flat level of a paddock type of thing but they'd play up there but mostly it was in the street or out the paddock.

SR: Well, look, talking about your family, what sort of a family do you come from?

MG: Well, two very kind parents, loving parents, very loving. My father has never hit one of us in his life. Didn't have to. We respected him and most times he wasn't stern; he was a very dry-witted man and he gained the respect – well, he gained the respect of everybody in this area but he certainly gained the respect of his children without violence of any description.

6.25 And my mother, all she wanted to do was hold you and hug you. But all the time they were worried: there was no money; very difficult, very difficult. He was the mayor of this area on three occasions and he couldn't get work himself. He was originally – his father lived in – had a big building in Botany Road in Beaconsfield down here a little and they had horses and carts and drays and that type of thing and my father in his earlier life was a brick carter. He'd cart bricks from the brickworks, which was only up here in Waterloo, to places like Maroubra that were being built and all that and two or three loads and earning fairly good money but when the Depression come the building stopped and he just could not get work; I think he was out of work for over five years and couldn't get work. And my mother, to help - our neighbour here was getting on in years then, he was much older than them – but he had two motor lorries that he parked in there as well – it's a double place there and he used to give my mother money to do his washing and his ironing and clean his house up and that sort of thing and that type of way they would get through.

8.02 My father would earn whatever he could but I mean there was no work. I remember at one stage he was working on the tramways, the tram lines here on Botany Road, I remember that very clearly. But it wasn't for long; they put them off after a couple of weeks and put somebody else on and they'd rotate. There was that much unemployment there'd be thirty or forty people waiting for that job; that was the type of thing you did. I remember – and I can't remember the dates, I certainly can't remember the dates but it was either 1934 – and I'm sure it was 1934 – it was either 1934 or 1938 where he – he was the mayor of Alexandria – and he and another friend of his, Reg Cope, who was the mayor of Redfern, through the councils that they represented went to see Bill McKell who was the – he wasn't the premier, I don't think - he was the minister for road transport or main roads or something like that and they approached him to get money to asphalt O'Riordan Street that was at that time just dust and dirt and kerb and gutter and he agreed and he gave them the money because he was in the Labor Party as well. He agreed and gave them the money and they went ahead and put a lot of men on to do the job but my father couldn't work on it because

he was a representative of the council so he couldn't get a job there but many of the people 'round here did. So it was tough, it was tough.

SR: Yes. And you said that your mother did a bit of cleaning or whatever.

10.03 MG: Yes.

SR: What about when there was no money?

MG: Well, what it was is that they gave you a dole and the dole comprised – now, remember I don't remember this, I can vaguely remember the finish of it – but what it comprised, I understand, from my mother and my father was that it was flour, sugar, syrup, tea, not milk and things like that type of thing. Now, to get it, to collect it, you had to go to, I think it was Redfern or even Central, that you had to somehow or other get down and get it. Now, my father had a twin brother and they were very close and they decided because the poor devils around here somehow or other had to get down to Central or wherever, so they decided between the two of them that they'd – through the Labor Party that they had formed here in 1923 – that they would go and get it and bring it back and dole it out to the people here. Anyhow, the government or whoever agreed that they could do it that way providing they got the dole slips and that's how it was. But things were so cheap too, Sue. I mean, I think a rabbit was thruppence, watermelons they'd almost give them to you and my mother insisted that we eat fruit, you know, no matter what fruit had to be there. And there was man just up the street who was a friend of ours and his children used to play with me, he was a fruiterer; he had the wagon with fruit and vegetables and that on it and he'd always see that everybody along the street got it as cheap as he possibly could.

12.14 So somehow or other they survived, I don't know how, I don't know how. And I remember one fellow telling me that for thruppence you could get in the tram here, go down to Circular Quay, have a schooner of beer and a lunch, get the tram back for thruppence.

SR: Sounds a bit far-fetched.

MG: Well, I don't think so, in those times I don't think so because the hotels couldn't do anything. He could have been wrong but I distinctly remember him telling me that. Now, I don't know whether it was a penny in the tram but the meal in the hotel was for nothing – it was a counter lunch, as they call it – but how much the schooner actually cost but he said for thruppence and I know we used to get into the local theatre for thruppence as a kid. But it was hard but I didn't feel it nearly as much as the adults would have felt it.

SR: Can you remember being hungry?

MG: No, I can't, I can't, yet I know that there were times when there was very little to eat but there was always fruit. And I would take an orange and run out and play or whatever but you had to be here for your meals; whatever the meal was you had to be here for it. But I never felt hunger – it's a desire,

you know. But, no, they were good parents and I don't know how they did it. I wish they were here to tell you how they did it but that was done, it was done.

14.01 **SR: What about other kids? Did you notice malnutrition or any signs of hunger amongst any of the other kids in the neighbourhood?**

MG: Well, I remember this: that I went to Waterloo School and then on to Gardeners Road School – Gardeners Road was a secondary school; at sixth class you left Waterloo and went to Cleveland Street or Gardeners Road or wherever – but I do remember this, that we used to look with envy at a child sitting there at lunch, eating a Sargents pie, and do remember some kids would eat half an apple and then throw the other half to one of his mates. That's how the kids themselves realised that it was tough, that their father was in a better position and that sort of thing.

SR: And the people that were unemployed, were they condemned as dole bludgers kind of thing?

MG: No, no, because there were so many of them. Even today are they're condemning people for being dole bludgers, it's gone because there are too many, too many have been through it to be calling them that.

SR: Yes.

MG: They weren't like that in those days; they'd take any work, any work. So that's what I can remember.

SR: In your family, who controlled the finances?

MG: What finances?

SR: Well, presumably in the later '30s when your dad did get some money or did get work - - -

MG: Yes, yes, my mother did. He used to bring – I remember early in the war he was selling – the federal government employed him as selling Victory Bonds and he'd have to go to various factories and make speeches and encourage them to invest in the war effort by purchasing a Victory Bond for five pound or ten pound or something like that, he'd bring the money home and she would look after it and whatever he wanted he'd tell her.

16.14 **SR: And that's his wage packet?**

MG: Yes.

SR: Yes.

MG: I've done that for the two marriages I've been in.

SR: It sounds like a good system.

MG: Well, the woman's there. She's got to handle it, hasn't she? I mean, she's got to have the money to live on.

SR: So your mother did all the budgeting?

MG: Yes. Well, she's the only one that would know how to budget for three children and for him as well because he wasn't here; he was out doing whatever he could to get the money to be here, yes.

SR: Were your parents religious?

MG: My mother was active in this little Church of England Church up here. Every Sunday she would go to the church, yes. He wasn't so religious. No, he would listen to what she would try and convince him of and he'd take it in but he believed in God, yes, certainly, but he doubted sometime if there was one with what he's seen around him. But they were both – what's the word I'm looking for? – they were both so sympathetic to what was happening around them, with the people that it was happening to and I think that's what made him go into politics and it's what made the people around here form the Australian Labor Party. I think that happened in 1923 – that was before the Depression – but he started that with a man named Tom O'Connor and they started the branch here and everybody turned to or the great majority of the people here turned to the ALP when this trouble was on because there was nobody else to turn to.

18.14 And they helped in every way that was possible. As I said, that little dance up there on a Saturday night, everybody would take a sandwich or something and the men would bring some beer and some lemonade for the women and that was their night out. And it affected both of them very, very – it went deep inside them, you could feel it.

SR: What did, sorry?

MG: The lack of money, the way people were suffering.

SR: Were those dances run by the ALP?

MG: Yes.

SR: So it would be a fundraiser?

MG: No, I don't think there was any charge, I don't think the city charged to go; people didn't have the money. But what they would do is take up sandwiches and coffee and tea and I think if I remember correctly there was an urn up there that they could make the tea with.

SR: That's funny. You said coffee then but were people drinking coffee at that time?

MG: We have always drank coffee, always, and tea. My mother was a great tea drinker but he'd drink tea or coffee, my father.

SR: Is that that stuff in bottles, an essence?

MG: You could buy that but, no, no they had the coffee grounds.

SR: Really?

MG: Yes. I mean, I think that was as cheap as tea. I could be wrong but I think that was as cheap as tea to use. But my mother was of French descent. He was a deadset Australian but she was of French descent and I think – she told me when she was a small girl she used to have to drink wine at the meal with her father because that was what the French do. But she'd like a cup of tea but she'd equally have a cup of coffee. To tell you the truth, Sue, I haven't had a cup of tea – I did have one with Teddy McDermott about six months ago – I haven't had a cup of tea in twenty or thirty years.

20.16 I'm a water drinker. I like a beer but I don't go chasing beer, looking for it, but if you ask me would I have a cup of tea, I'd say "Have you got a cup of coffee?" if I had to have one or the other.

SR: At that time it was quite unusual to hear people talking about coffee.

MG: Well, it may be in their home because remember with the dole you got tea, you didn't get coffee. How she got the money for coffee, I don't know, or whether we drank it at that time, I don't know, I can't remember that.

SR: Well, getting back to the political involvement of your family, the next question's were they politically involved? And quite obviously your father was mayor.

MG: Yes, they were politically involved. Mum was the mayoress on two or three occasions with my father and on another occasion one of the aldermen had been elected mayor and he was a bachelor so he asked her would she do it for him for that twelve months and she said yes. So she had more mayoresses than he had mayoralties, yes. And I think that the mayor – not the aldermen, the aldermen weren't paid any money, there was no money involved in that – but the mayor got, I think it was three pound – I could be wrong, it could have been three shillings, I don't know, but I think it was – I've got it into the back of my mind it was three pound they got for a month or something for entertainment and she used to make sandwiches here and then a council vehicle would pick it up and take it to Alexandria Town Hall for the aldermen after they had their meeting.

22.02 Then there'd be tea or whatever over there for them as well. But that was – what would you call it? - entertainment allowance but she used to make the sandwiches here.

SR: Your parents, did they talk about politics a lot?

MG: All the time.

SR: What can you remember of their views?

MG: The view was that it was unbelievably sad for what was happening to the ordinary people that lived around them.

SR: Can you remember the sacking of Lang?

MG: I know Lang, I knew Lang.

SR: Really?

MG: My father and Lang were friends. In later years I started a local newspaper and Lang had advised occasionally, advised me occasionally as to what to – not what to do but how to word what I was doing.

SR: So what was the paper called?

MG: South Sydney Observer. It lasted about five or six years. It was a fad but it done well, done well, and then in the Whitlam years a lot of newspapers, suburban newspapers, relied for their bread and butter, the printing, etcetera, on positions vacant. And one man, I had one man who approached me to allow him to sell the positions vacant to put it into the paper. He had played rugby league for Australia – I won't mention his name if that's all right, because he may not want me to – he had played rugby league for Australia and a very sensible man.

24.02 He said "Mick, would you close the paper up if I told you to, when the time came if I told you to", he said "If there was no future in the positions vacant?" and I had a lot of trust in him and I said "Yes, I would" because that was the bread and butter, that's what kept it going. And after about five years he said "Mate, for your own sake, it's reached the end of its tether". And he said "Now, don't be foolish like some of them will be and they'll go broke. You get out with a few bob that you've got". So I run it for another month or two and I could see that he was absolutely right.

SR: When was that, when did you have the paper?

MG: 1971 to - well, when Whitlam went out – I think it was 1975, wasn't it, something like that, yes. And he was absolutely right; there was a mini depression or a recession.

SR: Well, getting back to Lang, what can you tell me about Lang, what was he like?

MG: Well, everybody around here thought he was the best thing since sliced bread. When I was a small boy I'd been down to the Domain and heard Lang speak on many, many occasions and it still sticks in my mind the desire to help the people of New South Wales.

SR: Was he a good orator?

MG: Oh, marvellous, marvellous. And then there were many others. I remember another bloke, Jack Beasley, who was almost as good a Labor man. Yes, he was a very good orator.

SR: And what was Lang's reaction when he was dismissed from government?

25.54 MG: Well, I think Lang's trouble was that he could not get on with the New South Wales Labor Party machine, I think that was Lang's trouble, and when he got out he formed the Lang Labor Party and this branch that I told you started in 1923 in this area all went to Lang, and so did most of the local Labor parties in this area. But he was big enough a couple of years later to come back and say "There's no sense in staying with me. You go back to the Labor Party" so they did.

SR: Right.

MG: And they didn't do it sheep-like. They understood what he was saying, that to help the people of New South Wales there was no way that Lang could further help them and that the only way that these great number of people that were in the ALP – call them what you will, ordinary members of the ALP, sleepers that nobody knew about – in this branch alone at one stage there was over two hundred and eighty members, which was a third of the population of the area, including children and all. And I don't mean the children were in it, the movement, but I mean take the population of the area, two hundred and eighty of those were in that ALP.

SR: Well, what other politicians can you remember?

MG: Chifley and my father were friends. I only met Chifley on two or three occasions. Very strongly opposed to Lang and Lang very strongly opposed to Chifley but a good man, Ben Chifley.

SR: How did your father manage those friendships with the two?

28.01 MG: Well, they were members of the Australian Labor Party; they were there to help the people, not what is happening today, if I can put it that way, although fundamentally I think the Labor Party still wants to help, as much as it possibly can, the people. As my father has said and as Lang has said, the worst Labor Party, the worst Labor government in the world is ten times better than the best Liberal Party in the world. So, I mean, it's still the Labor Party, it still is the Labor Party and I don't say that blindly. I mean, I've been around this world a few times since those days and I've seen the system in Australia, I've seen it in Japan and in all those Asian countries and looked at the English type of thing; you won't find a more democratic system than what Australia has got, even though it is only a two party system, really. But look at this recent election, look at the number of people that are now in that are independent that have got in by having two and a half per cent or

four per cent and people voting for them. And some of them are donkey votes, they didn't know. I've seen one little Aboriginal girl up here at the polling booth on Saturday. She was just staring around the room with this long sheet of paper in her hand and she looked at me, she said "What'll I do?" I said put one on the …… vote". "Oh, thanks". She was completely lost. I was until I had a good look at it.

SR: O.K, now let's get back to the 1930s and when you were a kid. Well, what sort of discipline was used in the house? You said your father never, ever hit you.

MG: Never, never.

SR: So what happens if you were being a bit of a ratbag?

29.58 MG: Well, to give you an example, Sue, I came out of the air force after the war finished and I walked in one day and behind that door there at the back – there was only my mum and I here – and behind the door at the back there was a leather strap that had grooves cut in the bottom. I said "Don't tell me you've still got this thing". She said "I could never catch you". You'd get the slightest tap while you were running. She said "I had to have something to try and discipline you with".

SR: So your mum did the disciplining - - -

MG: Yes.

SR: - - - with this leather strap but she never really got - - -

MG: She waved it.

SR: So it was more of a threat?

MG: It was only a threat. And that's what she said, she said "But you were always too fast for me".

SR: Were you expected to contribute towards the family in any way, say when you got up to be about eight or ten years old?

MG: No.

SR: Didn't you have to sell papers or bottles?

MG: No, no, but what I did - - - [break in recording]

SR: Yes.

MG: Where the Beaconsfield Park is now, behind there many years ago there used to be a glass factory. Then they moved the factory from that position to another position further down and one of the kids 'round here got the bright

idea that he'd gather up the glass and it was big pieces of glass, not like a broken bottle but they were - - -

SR: Molten?

MG: Yes, pieces of molten glass. He took it back to the factory and sold it. So when all the kids 'round here heard that, everybody was up to selling molten glass - it was the old glass - back to the factory. That was one example but no, my mother always said to me "Look, make something of yourself. Study, learn, it's the only way out of this".

32.07 So there was no desire – although I left the secondary school, not because she wanted me to, she wanted me to go on and on and on but I left because I wanted to leave school. I'd reached what they call the end of the second year, the year before the Intermediate. I regretted it later because I had to do a lot of hard work - I was in the air crew and you had to a lot of hard work to get through those examinations to get what you wanted to be without that extra knowledge, that one year's extra knowledge. But I was thirteen years and ten months or something like that when I left school and I got a job.

SR: What did you get a job doing?

MG: The sportsmaster at Gardeners Road School got me the job. They made welding electrodes. In other words they cut wire and covered it with a film of something and they chopped it up and we were wrapping them and all of that type of thing. But later on I went to a place call …….. Stroud which was down in Alexandria and I became apprentice to a sheetmetal worker but I was only there for a short time -and I'll tell you the truth, I wasn't seventeen years of age - and I enlisted in the air crew.

SR: The air force?

MG: Yes, the pilot navigator air gunner business and wasn't there bedlam in this house over that.

SR: Yes, what was the reaction to that?

MG: Terrible. It was the only argument that my mother and father and I really had. They said "You're going to be killed".

SR: Could you actually choose when you signed up for the war, like you wanted to be in a - - -

33.54 MG: No, no. Because I was underage and I had to falsify my age - I was in what they call a protected industry that you could not enlist. Say I become eighteen and I was still working there, I could not then enlist because I was in a protected industry, making all parts. So I'd read where the records in Folkestone in Kent had been bombed and there was no records of births, deaths or marriages, it was all gone, the post office had gone so I cheated.

SR: That wouldn't be our records that went in England.

MG: No, I said I was born there.

SR: You told them you were a Pom [Australian slang for English]?

MG: And the recruiting sergeant told me I was the blackest Pom he ever seen because I was burnt swimming, I was as black as could be. However, he said "That doesn't worry us as long as you can pass this physical and written examination, that's all we want". But it was the only service that you could break away, that they would take you out of a protected industry.

SR: If you went into the air force?

MG: If you enlisted in air crew.

SR: In air crew, because that was really dangerous?

MG: I don't know about dangerous, it was what they wanted.

SR: So what were you, a pilot?

MG: I was doing pilot training when it all eventually finished. So I was eighteen months and still not.

SR: You'd been in for eighteen months?

MG: At least eighteen months and still had not seen action.

SR: So you were lucky?

MG: I was lucky but it did cause a lot of trouble here.

SR: They could have gone and told them that you were lying and underage and all the rest of it.

MG: They could have done all that.

SR: But they didn't.

MG: I had to convince them not to do it and all they were worried about was death.

SR: Yes, I'm surprised you were able to convince them. You would have had trouble convincing.

35.59 MG: Well, I told them was that if they didn't agree to it I'd run away. But it did cause a lot of upset, a lot of heartache.

SR: Yes, yes.

MG: So at least once a week I wrote to them and let them know how I was going.

SR: Well, what did your family do for fun? You've mentioned the dancers at the hall. I assume that all the families go, not just the mum and dad.

MG: No, all the five of us went there.

SR: And everybody else took their families?

MG: Of course, yes.

SR: And what did you do for music, actually, at these dances?

MG: Well, they'd have somebody that could play a piano and somebody else that'd have an accordion and that'd be it.

SR: O.K. Well, what else did you do for fun?

MG: Well, as I told you, the football.

SR: No, the family.

MG: The family, yes.

SR: Did the family do anything together?

MG: Yes. Well, again a lot of it to do, again because the ALP, they'd go on horse and carts to picnics and there was always some activity. And I'm not trying to make too big a deal of the ALP, I'm not trying to do that, but it was at that time the sort of centre or the hub of which they all gathered around.

SR: So where would they go for picnics?

MG: Yarra Bay, Sans Souci. Yarra Bay wasn't a bad place then and I still go out there occasionally and swim; I'll jump in the car and go out and have a swim. And they've cleaned it up and when I used to swim there, going back ten years, there was no sort of marine life there but now there's little fish, there's little crabs and that, prawns.

SR: And they were there in the '30s?

37.59 MG: Oh, yes. People used to live out there in tin sheds. They'd been evicted from their homes. They called it Happy Valley and they'd get some galvanised iron and make sort of a lean-to. And families, not only single men but families.

SR: You can remember that?

MG: I remember them being there, yes, because my father's mother died in 1933, I think it was, and we used to go of a weekend once a fortnight or so, my

grandfather and my father and his twin brother and his son, my uncle's son, and I, we were very close friends, we were very much the same age and we'd go out to the Botany Cemetery. Now, they'd leave us at the beach and they would go in to the grave and then they'd come back and maybe have a swim themselves and then we'd come home in the horse and cart.

SR: Do you remember people being evicted from here and, say, ending up at Yarra Bay, at Happy Valley?

MG: I can't remember individual people, no, but I know there was a lot from Redfern and I would imagine from this area that finished up in that position.

SR: Can you remember the Unemployed Workers' Movement? I mean, that was a Communist Party sort of initiative.

MG: Only what I've seen on the TV recently, dear, yes.

SR: Right.

MG: But I do remember the – what was it, the Workers of the World or something.

SR: Wobblies?

MG: Yes, I remember them mentioned.

SR: Do you?

MG: Yes, mentioned, and I mean at that time I remember quite well.

SR: Was the local ALP working together with the Unemployed Workers' Movement?

MG: I don't know and I don't believe so, I don't know.

SR: They were helping a lot of people with the evictions and trying to get a moratorium on evictions.

39.59 MG: Well, for all I know, Sue, it may have even been part of the ALP tied up together but I can't remember that part of it.

SR: O.K. In the evening, what did your family typically do in the evening?

MG: Well, my mother had eight siblings, there was nine of them, nine children, all lived in the street.

SR: Gosh.

MG: My father had five who all lived nearby – this place was always full. They'd always be coming to him for advice or wanting something. I don't mean that in a detrimental way; this was the place that they looked to.

SR: So you'd have lots of kids around here as well.

MG: All the time. That street was full of kids up till about half past eight in the evening.

SR: And were you free to go to your relatives' house and drop in and see your cousins?

MG: Of course, yes, yes, providing I'd say to my mum "I'm going down to see Billy" or something like that, and she'd say "All right. Well, now, you know your tea's going to be ready at half past five" or something like that. Then if I wasn't back she'd come and get me out of Billy's or wherever.

SR: So in the evening there'd always be people here and the kids'd be playing in the street?

MG: Yes, and that was that.

SR: Can you describe your mother's working day?

MG: No, I can't, except I'd say it'd be non-stop.

SR: Who worked harder, your mother or your dad?

MG: Well, I think my mother worked a lot harder in the house but he worked a lot harder helping people.

42.01 **SR: Well, how did the Depression affect your parents? I mean, well they'd already helped set up the Labor Party in 1923 - - -**

MG: '23.

SR: - - - and really there was a lot of unemployment all the way through the '20s anyway, it just got worse and worse.

MG: Yes, it got terrible in 1920 and '30 and that, yes.

SR: Well, what was the long term – did it have any effect on their health or what about even – you know, some people were embittered by the experience, some people were radicalised by the experience.

MG: I think the main thing was that they were sad. Like my mother, they'd have arguments about that. My mother'd go outside and there'd be a fellow walking along the street and he'd be drunk and she knew him, naturally, so she'd walk him home and see that everything was all right with him and his wife, like it was his lead in, she'd lead him in. Then she'd come home and

my father'd go crook, "Look, what are you doing that for? You know when they're drunk this is likely to happen. Why didn't you call out to me and I'd have walked him home?" But she done it, it was all done, by that time it was over with. But that was their main feeling and I think the sorrow that it had to happen and that it was happening and what was the answer to it.

SR: Did they think that it had to happen?

MG: No. They believed that it should never have happened.

SR: And who was responsible for it?

MG: Well, again big business, you know, the Christopher Skases of this world and without going any further than that there are plenty more and that the people were not getting a fair go. Because I mean I've seen men when I was a little boy, they'd have a horse and cart tied up and walking at four o'clock in the morning. I mean, it wasn't right that they shouldn't be earning a living. My father, when he did work and they worked as what they called as navvies, with picks and shovels, digging up roads, you know, it was hard work and there was no let up on it, there was no let up.

44.12 But down here I've got Bradford and Kendall's which is a huge foundry. Later on in years I become very close to a man that I used to train in the gymnasium that he owned and he explained – he was a little older than me and he fought for an Australian championship to – and he explained to me that when he was a young man he'd come from Balmain over to Bradford Kendall's and there might be five hundred men standing outside that door and they wanted five or six, and they talked to them as if they were dogs and they put you on one day and you would have to line up again the next day.

SR: That's awful, isn't it?

MG: Terrible, terrible. That's it.

SR: O.K, well, getting a bit more practical, what was a typical meal in your household at that time?

MG: Well, I think for breakfast we'd have porridge or whatever that type of cereal was, I can't remember really, and then there'd be toast and maybe jam or whatever, syrup or whatever the dole people happened to give them at that particular week. Lunch'd always be a sandwich of some description but dinner would always be the meal – she was a good cook, very good cook and I don't know how she did it when I think of it now.

SR: And what would you have?

45.56 MG: Well, maybe you'd have soup, maybe a casserole of some sort, stew. She used to make a – and her mother, because her mother was French – she'd get – it was delightful – a rabbit and somehow or other do it in tomato, it was soup and a little curry as well with rice and, oh, it was a beautiful meal, it

really was a beautiful meal but somehow or other she'd match up. Like the fish and chips, that was always on once a week. She made a very good meat pie, a really good meat pie.

SR: Would you usually have dessert as well?

MG: No, no, there'd be no money, but fruit. Fruit, she made sure there was fruit, fresh fruit.

SR: And what kind of variety was there of fruit and veg?

MG: Beautiful.

SR: But was it mostly seasonal?

MG: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. I mean, you'd get oranges that big (demonstrates visually), beautiful oranges, apples.

SR: But would you get them all year around?

MG: No, the same as it is now today. You see, I still love fruit. I that fridge I've got about a dozen peaches and they're just about finished and they're about that round (demonstrates visually). But the peaches we used to get would be like that (demonstrates visually). The tomatoes were completely different; I don't know what they do with tomatoes today, they've got no idea.

SR: Yes.

MG: But, I mean the fruit was, that was your dessert.

SR: Right. So in the Depression a lot of people did get sick and a lot of kids died from childhood diseases that they just probably wouldn't have died of if they'd had a decent nutrition base.

MG: A lot of them, yes, yes.

SR: I mean, did you remain healthy across those years?

MG: Well, yes, yes. And not only what they fed me but, as I say, I trained in a gymnasium, I've always done that. I still do it today, not in the gymnasium here; I still do it so that's always stuck to me.

48.11 **SR: Did you have to pay to go the gymnasium?**

MG: No.

SR: Then how did the guy make the living?

MG: He didn't, he didn't want to. He had been a champ.

SR: Who was he?

MG: Teddy Green. He held a championship and his brother, Jack, Jackie Green. There's no relation [to himself, interviewee Mick Green] or to my knowledge no relation. Jackie always said that he was to me, always, but Jackie was a man and I was a baby and Jackie held three Australian championships at the one time and he fought a world champion. And Jackie used to earn four hundred pounds a fight in those days. And you had Jack found himself working on the pick and shovel with my father 'round the road here. Now, what Jack did with his money I've got no idea. He certainly didn't have it in his years afterwards. So what he did, I think a lot went to his wife, they divorced. He lost a little boy under a tree that was struck by lightning and the boy was under the tree and crushed him at Booralee Park at Botany. But that's what stuck to me as well is the food that my mother gave me.

SR: And what sort of things did they have at a gym in those days?

MG: Certainly not all of this razzamatazz you see today. There'd be three or four different types of punching bags. We've got a little place up here; Teddy's the chairman of it, the Neighbourhood Watch. And I promised them, because I didn't know how the kids'd go, I promised them that I would teach them how to box for eight weeks and they spent about a thousand dollars on the equipment – it's not a lot of equipment.

50.07 So I did for eight weeks and some of them were there, didn't want to do it, so I just said to Ted "That's it" but I know he's angling to get me back and I probably will go back when the kids learn what they've got to do. But they expect to go in a gymnasium and start pulling weights up and down and getting onto a rowing machine. That's all unnecessary, that's not necessary at all but to keep yourself in good condition and we were in good condition.

SR: And so you just had punching bags?

MG: Yes, skipping ropes but the main thing is the exercises which requires nothing, only you and your body, it's all that's required, and the will to do it and feel so much better for it after.

SR: Yes.

MG: At forty five I was training at this particular friend's place over in Rosebery for years and years but what we would do is go and train and sweat and sweat and then go to the Rosebery Hotel and fill up again, which was ridiculous but it was our enjoyment.

SR: Well, when you were a kid who were your friends?

MG: Do you want me to name them?

SR: Yes.

MG: Well, next door but one on that side there was three boys around my age, Bevans, their name were. Teddy Green ……. …… ……. which is only just a little bit further down. Across the road were about five children of the King family. Just a little bit back this way was about four children of the Smith family, all boys, their name was Smith - he was an Australian soldier in WWI that married an English woman and brought her back. Just up the road was Preddies, the fellow I told you had the horse and cart with the fruit and the vegetables. Oh, God, there was any amount and they're only some that I can think of after going back sixty three or sixty four years ago.

52.11 **SR: You've mentioned marbles and cricket and football. What else did you do with your friends?**

MG: Got into trouble often.

SR: Tell us about some of the things you got into trouble.

MG: Well, scaling on trams was one thing. The tram would be going fast and you'd jump on it while it was going and then the conductor would start chasing you and you'd jump off and all of that silly nonsense.

SR: And did you just do it to annoy the conductors or was it you actually wanted to go somewhere?

MG: No, it was peer pressure, dear.

SR: Right, so it was competition?

MG: Of course.

SR: So it wasn't like you were actually going anywhere. This was just one of the activities that were - - -

MG: Yes. I've seen one boy – and I don't know how he could ever do it, I could never do it – but two trams would pass one another and they're only that far apart (demonstrates visually), he'd go scaling the tram, he'd go off one onto the other, go in the opposite direction. Now, how he could possibly do it, I don't know. But there was a Boys' Brigade up in this little church.

SR: What's that?

MG: It was a bit similar to the Scouts but it was a Church of England type thing and it was very strong in those particular years because they realised the trouble the people were in with the Depression and that and apparently the Church of England formed this thing and it become the Boys' Brigade. And I remember the man that ran it and I can still remember his name. His name was Mr Richards and he'd chase us up to go to this place and he'd come down and say to my mother or father "Mick didn't turn up tonight", so Mick'd get into trouble for not turning up that night up the thing.

SR: And where would you have been?

MG: Somebody's house, somebody they thought was interesting in the Boys' Brigade. But they'd teach you how to tie knots and camp – not to go camping but what you'd do camping - - -

54.03 **SR: If you theoretically went.**

MG: - - - if you went, yes, yes.

SR: And they never, ever took kids?

MG: They didn't take them anywhere, I don't think. Well, I certainly can't recall that they took us anywhere.

SR: O.K, well what else? Aside from the scaling the trams, what other things? You must have had some adventures.

MG: Plenty of adventures. Now, as we got more grown up a little and I still mean in the twelve and thirteen year age group, we were playing junior football. Say we're playing the team on the Saturday, we'd go on the Friday and fight them before we played them on the Saturday so they'd know what they were going to run into on the Saturday and all of that type of thing. But, I mean, there was say twenty kids which was silly - I mean, that was what went on.

SR: Was there much inter-suburb rivalry? I've heard things, it's sort of funny. People in the suburb next door always think – like the people in Kings Cross or Potts Point think "Oh, you don't go down to Woolloomooloo. You know, the Woolloomooloo mob" or whatever. Was there that kind of thing around here?

MG: No, it was more in football teams, which was representative of the little areas, like Kensington Football, all in the South Sydney Junior Football Club, which was Kensington, Mascot, Botany, Alexandria – no, they weren't in the competition – Zetland, Redfern All Blacks, teams like that, maybe thirty or forty teams and the rivalry was there on the football field.

SR: Right. So there wasn't other rivalry between the Redfern mob and the Newtown mob?

MG: Oh, yes.

SR: But not outside of football?

MG: No. But now I know what you're getting at. There'd be mobs going and fighting one another. Yes, yes, I remember all of that but I wasn't involved in it. I mean, nobody around this way were in that regard.

56.08 **SR: Yes. Beaconsfield seems a little – when you hear about the Redfern kids and you hear about the Newtown kids and I think the Alexandria and**

Erskineville kids, they used to have a bit of rumble with the Newtown ones but you don't hear anything about Beaconsfield.

MG: No. Well, if you heard about the football team, which was a very old established – I think when rugby league first come out, my grandfather told me that the Carringtons would play in rugby union then, so that was 1908.

SR: And were there areas around here that were considered wilder - do you know what I mean? Were there areas that you looked down upon in terms of social status?

MG: No.

SR: Like were there other areas that you thought were more affluent?

MG: No, no, because in this area everybody was in the same boat, whether it was in Beaconsfield, Redfern, Waterloo, Zetland, Rosebery - maybe people in Rosebery had a few more bob but it wouldn't be much – Mascot and all of that, they were all in the same boat.

SR: But were any of the areas considered where the kids were wilder?

MG: Yes, we were about the wildest. This Carrington Football Club was forever being told they'd have to get out of the competition and go and play somewhere else. But, no, I got on extremely well. I've got friends – and I'm not saying this in a boastful manner but I've got friends everywhere. When my two little daughters used to go with me to Mascot, shopping, everybody would say "Hello, Mick, hello, Mick, hello, Mick". They'd say "Daddy, do you know everybody in Mascot?" But it's people that you've known over the many, many years by playing football, playing cricket, boxing or whatever and knowing them from that far back.

58.07 And, of course, dad being a member of parliament around here for twenty years I would certainly have to know a few through him.

SR: Your dad, no, he was a mayor. Was he a member of parliament as well?

MG: He was the member for Redfern, the state member for Redfern for twenty years.

SR: What was his name?

MG: Fred Green.

SR: Fred Green. Gosh, what years were they?

MG: 1949, 1950 to 1969 and 1970.

SR: Gosh.

MG: Yes, he was.

SR: Yes, that's a huge amount of time, isn't it?

MG: Yes.

**

Part 2

SR: Here with Mick Green, 28th of March 1995. Mick, you've just revealed to me that your dad was a state member of parliament for Redfern for twenty years.

MG: Yes.

SR: So how old were you when he first got elected?

MG: 1950. I was born in 1926 – twenty four.

SR: Right. So he took quite a long time to get around to going into state politics.

MG: Yes. Well, he would never oppose a sitting Labor member.

SR: Right.

MG: Now, that's not an excuse, that's a fact, and the sitting Labor member was William McKell who later became the governor general of Australia. Then there was another man that beat my father in a preselection ballot, a man named Harry Noble, and he was a member for about eighteen months after McKell went into the governor generalship and then he passed away. Then they had a preselection ballot with the usual ALP dogfight and he won the preselection and won the seat.

60.07 **SR: And what motivated him? Was that still continuing on from the Depression and his desire to help people?**

MG: Yes, yes. In fact, when he was the member here, the number of people in here grew bigger, there was more people coming in than there had been throughout the other years of my life with him through the ALP.

SR: And what role did your mother have in all this?

MG: I would say that he'd be the first to say to you, without Helen he would never have taken any role; she was like a driving force to him.

SR: And did she get involved politically? I mean, presumably there would have been functions and he would have a lot of – did he ever get to be a minister or anything?

MG: No, he was the whip, the government whip.

SR: So did your mother actually ever use her contacts and what have you to assist people?

MG: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Oh, yes, I remember my father – these high-rises at Redfern, the high-rise buildings at Redfern – I remember the first time the Housing Commission came into it. They were building Housing Commission homes and he would not go – at that particular time he would not go beyond a two-storey French – they call it the French maisonette which was a two-storey block of units that encircled a square in the middle where grass was and clothes washing facilities and all that were, he didn't want to go beyond that but eventually they forced him to or the housing minister forced him to accept a four-story and he wouldn't go any higher than that.

62.02 So he didn't believe in the high-rise. He believed that the way of life was as it should have been and he was upset that the people of Redfern and Waterloo in which these places were being built were not going back into them.

SR: Who were they moving into them?

MG: Well, what they were doing were moving the people that were in there - before they pulled the older homes down to build them – they were moving them into Housing Commissions say out at Liverpool or somewhere like that where the people did not want to go but there was no way out of it. But he said that they should have the first right to go straight back but it never worked out that way. Some of them did and some of them got it; some of them approached him and he made sure they got it because they were in the Housing Commission; you had to be in the Housing Commission to do anything, you had to be on the roll of the Housing Commission to get anywhere.

SR: Was that the time of greatest change in this area was those flats coming in? If you were to look back on your life, what era or event or something precipitated the time of great change?

MG: I think the end of WWII. The men that had served overseas were not going back to the dole, they were never going back into letting the bosses get everything and then get nothing; the unions became stronger within itself. I worked at a place down here recently for eleven years as a union delegate, Austral Bronze, and much to my amazement they had no redundancy scheme. I found out a little later that five years prior to me being employed there that every man was sacked at Christmas and re-employed again after the holidays. That was shocking.

64.06 **SR: Well, that was up until recent times.**

MG: Yes, yes, that wasn't any more than fifteen years ago. I seen one man that worked there for forty years finish up with eleven thousand dollars and he hadn't taken any sick leave. So I immediately brought in a redundancy scheme of some description, as long as it was in there.

SR: That's changed, working conditions, and that's more recently but what was the - - -

MG: Yes. Well, to get back, I think it was WWII, that they weren't going back to that, they weren't going back to that cap in hand and that sort of nonsense. Jesus, they'd fought the toughest enemy in the world and defeated him everywhere they fought him, they weren't interested in what Austral Bronze bosses thought, they knew what they had to owe for this country. They loved their country, Australians do love their country. That was one of the reasons that I enlisted: I didn't want the Japanese running around down here.

SR: So you didn't enlist when the fight was in Europe with the Germans?

MG: Oh, yes, yes, that was there, that was on, it was well and truly on - - -

SR: I know that that was on but what motivated - - -

MG: - - - but so was the war with Japan and they were coming, they were down, and they were in Rabaul and they were in New Guinea. How much closer could you get?

SR: Yes.

MG: And according to Menzies they let them into the Brisbane line. And what would a young boy of sixteen, seventeen, would he be thinking, a young, eager kid that his mother and sisters and his father was here? And that's what enticed most of them in. They say it was adventure that they went for. It wasn't adventure that won the Battle of Kokoda Trail, it was little kids of eighteen years of age.

SR: People took the war a lot more seriously once the Japanese became involved, didn't they?

66.02 MG: Well, it was there, it was on their doorstep.

SR: Before you diverged onto all that, somehow we were talking about - - -

MG: We were talking about – yes.

SR: - - - and we were talking about friends and what you do with your friends. One of the questions I wanted to ask was how far did you roam, how free were you to roam as a child?

MG: Well, again as I told you, I'd say to my mother "I'm going down to see Billy" and she's say "Look, your dinner'll be ready at half past five".

SR: So it was just the immediate neighbourhood?

MG: Yes, oh, yes, yes, yes.

SR: So you never went over to the airport?

MG: This was raised with that fellow that I was telling you about that's older than I am that's got that single home. He said "Do you remember when we were kids, Mick?" He said "We'd run up onto the top of Collins Street and Queen Street and it was all sand hills and you could look down and almost see what was the paddock of Mascot Airport". And somebody'd yell out to the kids "Look, there's a plane coming in" and we'd all run up and you could almost see it landing on this flat piece of earth out at Mascot. There was no factories then, no big factories like this (indicates visually) in between and I suppose we've seen many of Kingsford Smiths and Amy Johnson – although she was a bit earlier than I would be, remember – but I suppose there was all of those landing at - - -

SR: Did you never go over there?

MG: Well, it was too far to go. Like I mean you could have perhaps gone there in ten minutes but if say there was a family a couple of doors down and they'd say "Well, we're going to Manly today and can Mickey come?" , mum'd say "Yes, of course". But as a mob, because remember I was still young – when I got to sixteen or something like that, of course you were running around but when you're a boy you don't, no.

68.01 **SR: Did you have toys or books?**

MG: Yes, I read a lot, I read a lot.

SR: What were your favourite books or authors?

MG: Oh, adventure books of any description, you know. And we only had the radio, there was no TV.

SR: Do you remember any radio programs?

MG: I remember one night my father and I nearly died here. There used to be a chimney there because there was a fireplace here (indicates visually), right here, it's all torn out now but there was a fireplace just there. And he was going to get a cozy instead of the open fireplace; he'd got hold of some cozy from somewhere, I don't know.

SR: What's a cozy?

MG: It was a closed-in stove that had, I think it had a Pyrex face and you loaded it with coke from the top. First of all you loaded it with wood and then when it got going you loaded it with coke and you got beautiful heat, very hot, and the chimney went up – there was an existing chimney – and it went up

through there. Anyhow, prior to him putting it in – he had it all ready to put in – but he wanted to listen to the test cricket with me in England and we sat here by a little open four gallon kerosene tin full of coke and we didn't wake up for two days.

SR: What happened?

MG: Carbon monoxide, nearly killed the two of us.

SR: Because the chimney wasn't in?

MG: There was no chimney there and we sat up from eleven in the night till about five in the morning because Bradman had scored three hundred and – we listened to him score three hundred and odd runs or something and my mother, she had to go to the doctor and all because we just didn't wake up. We weren't sick, we just didn't wake up but I think it was a day and a half or two days.

SR: That must have been a terrible fright.

69.58 MG: Well, you didn't know anything about it. I went to bed all right; I thought I was all right. I was sitting on his knee – he was sitting there (indicates visually), facing the fire and the radio was on the shelf there (indicates visually) and I just went into bed and never thought about it and I imagine he felt the same way. So he immediately got the cozy put in or he put it in himself but that was the way it was. But there was entertainment of some description all the time.

SR: Can you remember any radio programs?

MG: God, now I can't remember that far back. I can remember the cricket; everybody listened to the cricket in England when it was on. But it was a late night, it was about eleven o'clock in the night that started or ten thirty in the night and it went until five or six in the morning. But, yes, 'Dad and Dave', I remember 'Dad and Dave' very well, that was a session on the radio. And there was a couple of other ones but there's one that just comes to mind and I can't think at this moment of other ones, I'm sure, too.

SR: Were there any places you were not allowed to go as a child?

MG: Yes. There was across the road behind the Rosebery Hotel was a big pool. It had been a brick pit and its depth was unknown and it was huge and alongside of it was a place called Burroughs Wellcome, the chemical company. But this pool that I'm talking about was a hundred and fifty yards – oh, well, two hundred and fifty yards across but it was a circular thing and what had happened is when they were down, digging the bricks out, hundreds and hundreds of feet down they struck a spring and one man and his horse never got out.

SR: It just gushed through?

MG: It gushed through and it was so deep that by the time he got up to the top he was drowned. And that was where I was – nobody was allowed to go there but everybody did.

72.10 **SR: Would they swim in it?**

MG: To swim. It was beautiful, clear water, crystal clear water and Burroughs Wellcome was using it and throwing the chemicals back into it but it made it better still, it cleared the water. They used to swim in there, all Burroughs Wellcome's workers swam in there. And my mother forbade me to do that. But then I had an uncle, my mother's brother, and he was a big six footer and a young bloke – he died at eighteen with peritonitis but a very, very good swimmer and he could get anything off my mother, she loved him. He said "Nug, I'm going to take him over to teach him to swim" and she went on about it. So when we got over there he just threw me in and that was it, I learned to swim very quickly. Then I had another uncle - his brother lived straight across the road – and he was an SP bookmaker and he used to take me three or four times a week swimming out to Coogee; he had a car and we'd go out to Coogee before I went to school for an hour or so every morning. But, yes, it was marvellous what there was to do. It wasn't as if you're sitting at home and that there was nothing to do, it was that there was too much to do. But now you say to me what was it, well, I just can't answer in that regard. Of course we listened to the radio but there wasn't much chance to listen to the radio when there were all the people coming in and out.

SR: Yes, yes. O.K, so your mum wouldn't let you go to that place.

MG: Swimming to this.

SR: Well, even after you learned to swim, were you allowed to go?

MG: No, she still didn't like it, she didn't like it.

SR: Was there anywhere else that you weren't allowed to go?

MG: Not that I can think of.

SR: Were there people that you had to avoid?

MG: No.

SR: O.K. You've mentioned your schools that you went to. Where did you go?

74.03 MG: Waterloo School.

SR: And what was that like there?

MG: The kids were very, very good; teachers were good, but again public.

SR: Can you remember much about your school days?

MG: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: Well, what can you remember?

MG: Well, in what way?

SR: I don't know. What comes to your mind? When you think back of you being at school, back there, what image jumps into your mind?

MG: Sports, sports.

SR: What did you play?

MG: Football, swimming – we went swimming once a week.

SR: Where?

MG: Brighton, from Waterloo to Brighton. That was a school subject, an afternoon given to that, and we'd leave about eleven o'clock in the tram, all of us in that particular class or whatever, and go swimming with the teacher – and I remember his name, McPherson. Later on, when I left there, went to Gardeners Road, which was renowned for its sports, Gardeners Road, the same thing: football, cricket and handball.

SR: What was the discipline used?

MG: It was the cane; it was the cane if you played up.

SR: Were you encouraged to go on academically or was it assumed that kids in that area would end up being workers?

MG: Oh, no, no, the teachers took an interest in you getting on and staying at school, particularly at Gardeners Road, particularly at Gardeners Road, to go on further and become something. I had a teacher that was a maths teacher in – I don't know what they'd call it now but it was in first year of the senior – after primary school, it was the first year after that. His name was Ken Brokenshire and his aim was that if you weren't listening he broke the chalk in half and threw it at you and it hurt if it hit you.

76.10 And some years later at a place called Bradfield Park over at Chatswood I'm in the air force and he's a flying officer observer. He said "Mickey Green, they're going to catch up with you one day". So he knew. But, no, they were interested in your – even he was interested in just how far I got, how far was I going, what I was going to do, etcetera. That was why it comes to my mind: yes, they were very interested, the teachers, in all the children getting on. The headmaster – no, I shouldn't say that – the headmaster of the secondary school was a man called Rupert Brown and he was very good for each child, like he wanted to see everybody get on. And his punishment

was this: if he caught you smoking, which he did me one day - I was over examining a football ground to see if we could play on it that day or whether it was too wet and somebody told him that I was smoking over there – and this was his treatment: "There's two alternatives, Mick. I'll send a letter home to your mother by somebody else, not by you", he said, "or you sit here and smoke that pipe".

SR: And how long did you have to smoke it for?

MG: He said "Just see how you go with it. You want to smoke, try it", so I did. I was as sick as a dog afterwards so I stopped smoking then. I've taken it up since.

SR: And so were you happy at school?

MG: Oh, yes.

SR: And I want to ask about sex education and did you get any?

MG: No.

SR: From anybody?

77.59 MG: Well, my father said, when I was about sixteen he said to me, "Mother's asked me to have a talk to you". I said "What about?" He said "Girls and sex" he said "but I've told her you know more about it than I do so it's a waste of time". He said "Do you?" I said "Enough, Fred, enough". But that was – no, you'd get it from the people, the peers, the boys that you were knocking about with; sometimes from the girls, they'd educate you. But, no, there was never – not that it was frowned upon but it was the man's, the father's job to tell the boy, the mother's job to tell the girl, I imagine, and that was his advice to me: "I told her that you could tell me about it".

SR: When you're talking about the area, what sort of ethnic mix? I haven't heard anything except Anglo-Saxon kind of names.

MG: Well, that was pretty well that's what it was as far as I can remember or if it wasn't we took no notice of it and I don't mean that we took no notice in a racist type of way. For instance, there was one boy that I went to school with and he was only young and he'd come from Germany and he went to school – this was before the war, well before the war, 1936, '35, something like that – he went to school in a German sailor suit so you can imagine his reception with the kids at the school.

SR: But that wouldn't have had anything to do with him being German, it would have been the sailor suit.

MG: Well, no, because the kids were reading what was on the sailor suit, like what was 'round the little rim of the – "Something Koenig" or something like that and I said to him – his name was Godfrey – I said to him "Godfrey,

get out of the suit, for God's sake". So he did. But they'd come out here, they were refugees from Hitler, there was no doubt in the world about that, and his father was a glassblower and he'd received an offer of a job with the ACI over here, Schmidt, who was a German himself originally, who owned ACI.

80.11 **SR: Do you think Godfrey might have been Jewish?**

MG: No, he was white, blond, and I know there are a lot of Jewish blonds but I believe that the father could see what was coming. And there was an elder brother and elder sister and Godfrey.

SR: I wonder what happened to them during the war, I wonder if they were - - -

MG: No, they came here; they were here during the war.

SR: But the Australian authorities interned everybody who weren't - - -

MG: Well, these people weren't interned because Godfrey right through the war he still lived down there.

SR: Good. There's some awful stories about what happened ……

MG: Dear, I know. I had a very good friend and his father was an importer of wine and a producer of wine in Australia, one of the biggest in Australia, and he was interned and that man – it was his father - that man never got over that.

SR: What was the name? O.K.

MG: No, I'll tell you. Fiorelli, Vic Fiorelli - - -

SR: Gee.

MG: - - - yet that man was more Australian than I am but I don't know about his father. His name was Mick Fiorelli, Vic was the son. And Vic, I believe, still holds the record in the South Sydney area for getting the most wickets as a slow bowler. Vic was more Australian than I am but his father was interned during the war.

SR: Were there any Asian families around, Chinese families?

MG: Yes, yes, but Chinese not as families. Out at Mascot and Botany there was Chinese gardeners and every morning – you could almost set your clock to it – you'd hear the clip, clop, clip, clop of the horse and cart going into the markets.

SR: Up what, Botany Road?

82.00 MG: Botany Road. And then they'd come back and the horse to drive itself. The bloke'd be asleep, the poor Chinaman, he'd worked all day and all night, he's asleep but the horse knew where to go.

SR: But they never had kids?

MG: Never seen them, never seen them. But I didn't see many Chinese. I suppose at the school there'd be a couple but racism never played any part.

SR: What about Aboriginal families – were there any around then?

MG: Well, now some of the people that I drink with and are very close friends are Aboriginal people. One's Sol Belair that you often see on the TV with that ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] thing. Have you ever seen Sol?

SR: No.

MG: Right. And there's a lot of them that I see and know very well.

SR: But were there any in the neighbourhood when you were growing up?

MG: No.

SR: Well, how would you describe the neighbourhood? Was it residential, industrial or mixed?

MG: Industrial. Fred, my father, fought to make it residential but the best [NSW Premier] Askin could give him was that "You'd have to split it, Fred, industry and resident". He said "I've got a side to look after too", he said "My blokes have got businesses in the area".

SR: But obviously you were living here so there must have been some.

MG: It was always a mix but the big industries have gone.

SR: What were the big industries that were here before?

MG: Bradford Kendall, Austral Bronze, that's just to name two, that employed over a thousand men. I mean, I think Bradford Kendall's – again, this is only to give you an indication of their size – was the first country in the world to build a solid tank, cast a tank that there was no rivets in it that could kill a man. When the tank was hit by a shell, the rivets used to fly out and kill the men inside it and Bradford Kendall's built the first tank that was made in one piece sort of thing.

8404 **SR: Gee.**

MG: So it was a huge industry, big industry. There was plenty of them around. But we always lived around here. I think that there's more little industry

infringing into this little residential area now than there ever was in those times. Perhaps I'm wrong.

SR: And where did most people work? I suppose when you were a kid most people weren't working.

MG: Well, they weren't working.

SR: Did those big factories shut down in the Depression?

MG: No, as I say, you'd go to Bradford Kendall's and there'd be fifty or five hundred men or something and they'd want one or five.

SR: Was there any sense of those big companies looking after the locals? I mean, they are in this area.

MG: Well, a great deal of the locals worked for them. They do but when the Depression came they were put off and I suppose they were in the queue, looking for the day's work themselves.

SR: And what's the relationship been between the residents, the people living here, and the industries?

MG: Well, it would depend on the industry itself. I mean, many people used to complain to my father about the smoke coming out of such and such a chimney and it was wrong and then the government would make them put a muffler of some description on it or to stop it but he always complained about this thing up here, this incinerator.

SR: The Waterloo?

MG: Yes, he was never the member then, he was retired then.

SR: Was there much pollution around, can you remember, in the '30s?

MG: No, it was a lot, there was nothing: the cars weren't on the road.

SR: But people had fuel fires and stoves.

MG: Yes, but I mean the air was always cleaner and better. They'd have a fuel fire but I mean that compared to a car, I don't think – well, I was driving behind a semi-trailer the other day and, my God, it was like driving behind a smokescreen.

SR: Well, I was wondering, I was going to ask about the social focus of the area but you've already talked about the ALP. And would you say that the ALP and their functions and this house and that, was that the social focus or was there another focus?

86.11 MG: This house for my family, the ALP in general, yes. For instance, one of the fellows that started the ALP with my dad was Tom O'Connor. He had about nine or ten kids and he lived down the other end of Queen Street. You'd have plenty of social life if he wanted down there with them. I mean, the people in that area would go to Tom O'Connor for things that they wanted done in the area.

SR: Was there any kind of pub or place like that where people went?

MG: Yes, there's the Rosebery Hotel there; I drank there for many, many years. There was another one across the road, the Empress of India, that was almost opposite the Rosebery Hotel but the Rosebery Hotel was a little old weatherboard place with a horse trough outside it but it's certainly changed now, hasn't it? Well, it's a big, modern – I think the new pub was built about 1939 – it's a modern triple storey or double-storey place. The Empress of India went.

SR: Was it a safe neighbourhood?

MG: Yes.

SR: Where would people meet to talk informally, where would the women meet?

MG: Go to one another's homes, go to the church. The church was used not only as a church. Now, my mother and her friends would often put plays on up there, they'd be in plays and things like that.

SR: Was that just a church drama group, was it?

MG: No, no, it was for anybody that wanted to go up there. Yes, they did, they put it on for publication but they'd enjoy doing it there, with practising and doing that.

SR: Women would do that?

88.00 MG: Oh, yes.

SR: What else would they do?

MG: Well, they'd knit, they'd sew; have jumble sales and all of that sort of thing.

SR: And what was the binding thing that operated amongst the women?

MG: I couldn't tell you that.

SR: It wasn't the church?

MG: No, it wasn't the church. A lot of women were in the ALP but that dance was for anybody, that was an ALP dance but it was a free dance and that was

for anybody who wanted to go to a dance. But to get back to what you're asking, I don't know what the binding thing was.

SR: In those days, was the neighbourhood pretty stable in terms of who lived here? I was thinking if you knew everybody and the same people were living here year after year after year, you don't need a club.

MG: Did it become boring?

SR: No, no.

MG: Well, it didn't.

SR: You'd be able to say "Hey, so and so and so and so, let's put on a play?"

MG: Yes, and not only that. Say for instance on a Friday night somebody'd say "It's Jimmy Smith's birthday. There's a party on" and everybody'd go over to Jimmy Smith's birthday party with their own beer or drink and with their own sandwiches, etcetera; they made sure they didn't impose on Jimmy Smith's mother and father.

SR: So are you saying that it was a stable population here then?

MG: I would say, yes.

SR: Do you remember much movement and many strangers?

MG: No. I used to often hear about that somebody in Redfern had to do a midnight flit, he had to get out, he owed too much rent. I know we owed rent for a while and I think he had to do something and I don't know what he sold; he may have even sold a horse to pay that back rent.

SR: Who?

MG: My father.

SR: You had a horse?

MG: He had a horse and if you remember what I told you he was a brick carrier.

SR: That's right, yes.

MG: But whatever, he repaid that rent. [Break in recording]

**

90.04 **SR: And when did your parents buy this place?**

MG: Towards the end of the war, I believe. And they paid a deposit on a block of land further up Victoria Street, on this same side but across Collins Street;

the intention was to build a new home. By this time he had improved his position; mum certainly wasn't working; what he was doing, I don't know but he was in a position where he was paying this thing off. Then he bought a little pony for his grandson, my elder sister's son. She had a daughter first and then a son and at six years of age the son was killed, crossing Botany Road by the bus.

SR: On the horse?

MG: No, delivering a message for somebody, on a message for somebody. It nearly broke all our hearts; he was a lovely kid. So that ended that. The horse went …… …… …….. The next thing, when he become a member of parliament he said "Mick, will you do something for me?" and I said "If I can, Fred". He said "Will you take your mother to Bundeena and find a block of land near the water. It's what she wants", so I did. And they started to build on that – this is when he wasn't a member of parliament – they started to build on that, then the builder died and I finished the place off, my friends and I, we finished it off, most of it off. So that was what happened in regard to that. Now, you asked me about the people ……

92.08 **SR: Just the stability of the neighbourhood and if people were mostly renting.**

MG: Oh, they were all renting; there'd be very few who owned their own home, very few.

SR: Well, didn't people get evicted if they couldn't pay their rent in the Depression?

MG: Sure. And somehow or other there wasn't a movement of people running out and not paying rents, you know, owing large amounts of rents and not paying it. Whether the landlords were reasonable or thought that – well, in my father's case I know that he held that rent back for months because he knew the position that they were in. But, I mean, he was a businessman and you don't run a business that way. So all I can tell you, I don't know how the rest of the people did it, but most of them are gone now.

SR: Well, where have they all gone to?

MG: God knows. When you ask me that I know some have gone up to Central Coast, some have gone into Queensland, some have gone out Liverpool way and all of that but how they went there and why I don't know.

SR: It must be sad, seeing everybody move from the neighbourhood.

MG: Well, it's sad to see new faces. Can I say that?

SR: Yes.

MG: It's sad to see the old faces go, yes, but the new faces because again Teddy McDermott's trying to do something, a similar thing that the ALP was doing then. There's still the ALP in existence; his son is the president of that branch. Now, they've formed a Neighbourhood Watch which works in this area and he tries to get people involved in that, by having parties up at the parks and jazz concerts and all of that. So if that answers what you're - - -

94.11 **SR: People rebuilding it here.**

MG: People that come here to the neighbourhood and he's walking them up there.

SR: Yes. But thinking back to the '30s, what smells can you remember?

MG: Well, I suppose the first one, I think, was the boiling downs in O'Riordan Street.

SR: Boiling downwards?

MG: Yes, where the old horses were. They killed a horse, then skin him and boil him down to become gruel or something – I don't know what they did with it – but that was on for many years but it didn't blow this way much.

SR: That would have been a pretty awful smell, wouldn't it?

MG: Shocking. Ask the queen.

SR: Why?

MG: She screamed about it and they only took her through O'Riordan once; the next time they took her another way.

SR: Tell me, tell me that story.

MG: Well, I understand that at the time they picked her up at Mascot Airport and come along O'Riordan Street and of course the boiling down's going for bolts.

SR: When was that, in the '50s?

MG: Yes, it would have been the first time she was ever here but then the second, the next time she come – I don't know this for a fact, only that they did say that she was upset and they were upset about it, the odour. But it used to not blow this way. For some reason or another – and it was along O'Riordan Street here, a fair way down, before you got to Gardeners Road but very close to Gardeners Road but if you were on O'Riordan Street you'd certainly and in Beaconsfield Street you'd smell it.

SR: And when did that happen?

MG: Well, I would say in the early ’50s - again I could be wrong. And still they're in a form, not the boiling down part but the bones. They collect, all the meat bones and that, they made ……. gruel or something out of the thing.

SR: And so that sort of functioned there?

MG: Yes, as far as I know something’s functioning down there.

SR: Can you remember any other smells?

96.03 MG: No.

SR: Sounds, what sounds? If you think back to your childhood, 1930s here, what do you hear?

MG: Well, it was at that corner (indicates visually) the thing that I can remember, as I told you, the Chinese, the horse and carts going along Botany Road in the early hours of the morning, clip, clop, clip, clop. I used to sleep there. There was a lounge, pull-out lounge come bed type thing and you’d hear that but they weren't foreign sounds, they weren't a sound that you couldn’t live with.

SR: Or identify.

MG: Or identify immediately, you’d know what it was.

SR: One thing I wanted to ask you, can you remember any rituals? Like we’ve got Christmas and Easter but people used to celebrate – and there’s Cracker Night, I suppose - - -

MG: Yes.

SR: - - - but people used to celebrate – was Cracker Night on Empire Day or something?

MG: Yes, it was Guy Fawkes’ night but it was I think they held it on Empire Day. I don't know whether they – I know Empire Day was the Cracker Night, so whether they held it on Empire Day on Guy Fawkes’ birthday or the other way around, I don't know.

SR: Can you remember any other rituals like flag raising and waving and that kind of thing?

MG: Yes, yes, I remember. I remember going with my parents, again because they were a mayor or an alderman on the South Sydney Council, to the hundred and fiftieth, when Australia was a hundred and fifty year old. I remember that, that was in 1938, I think, and everybody was invited on these ferries and we went all over the harbour, celebrating, just like the two

hundredth year one. I remember that and that was fifty years before the two hundredth one.

SR: Do you remember any other regular sorts of things like Arbour Day or, you know, I don't know really.

98.06 MG: Well, I used to go because a couple of my friends were in it with the eighteen footer racing on the harbour, the sailboats on the harbour, the eighteen footers. I crewed one a couple of times but those times I was on the ferry, watching them race.

SR: That would have been when you were older.

MG: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: O.K. From your childhood, can you remember any big events? I suppose you've mentioned that hundred and fifty year thing. Any other big events that stand out in your mind?

MG: No, no, I don't think so.

SR: O.K. What about local characters?

MG: There's plenty of them. Again because it's a political family, I imagine, and there was during the Depression – and I can just vaguely remember him – but Bob Heffron was here one night and he said to me, he said "How far can you go back, Mick?" I said "I don't know". He said "Do you remember the white rat?" I said "Yes". He said "Geez, that's going back a long way". And the white rat was – he wasn't really, he was unbalanced, but where a politician would stand on a street corner – this is what used to happen, they'd stand on a street corner and everybody'd gather 'round them and they'd make a speech instead of door knocking and they did all that too but I mean that was where they made their spiel as to what they would do. And this fellow – I don't know who he represented – certainly wasn't the Labor Party and it wasn't the Liberal Party – but he carried his own soapbox with him, in the tram, no matter what, and he'd stand up and he'd talk complete rubbish and he was an old beano and that's why they called him the white rat. But when Bob Heffron mentioned that – and that's going back a long time since Heffron mentioned it but it stuck in my mind because I think he thought it may have if he'd mentioned that and I do remember it, yes.

100.10 **SR: Can you remember any other characters?**

MG: Look, no, offhand I'd be guessing.

SR: O.K. Where did most people shop?

MG: Locally.

SR: Where's that?

MG: Well, there was a shop on that corner, at the corner of Victoria Street and Collins Street. There was a shop halfway down Victoria Street on the other side of the road.

SR: So little corner shops they'd shop at, not big supermarkets?

MG: Yes, it wasn't supermarkets for things like that.

SR: But did people shop on a daily basis, did they?

MG: I think they shopped when they had some money. Yes, I don't think it was a matter of a daily or a weekly or "We're going shopping", it just wasn't around. I remember, for instance - my sister, Blanche, said "Don't forget to mention this" – there was a man sold rabbits and other times he sold clothes props and I said "No, I won't forget to mention that" so I think they would buy when they had money; they couldn't buy at any other time.

SR: So what major appliances did you have? I mean, how did you keep food fresh?

MG: Appliances? There were no appliances. You had an ice chest.

SR: And where'd you get the ice from?

MG: The ice man'd come 'round and if you didn't have the money for the ice you didn't use the ice chest.

SR: So that was sort of a bit of a luxury?

MG: Yes, yes.

SR: Can you remember any jokes or tricks that kids would play?

42.04 MG: Oh, well, on Cracker Night they'd blow everybody's whatsaname up, the letterboxes, that'd happen, and they'd knock on doors and then run 'round the corner or something and disturb them, anything to disturb somebody. But on the average kids were good. And I'm not saying that because I was one of them, I suppose, but you don't see the stupidity that goes on today.

SR: Can you remember any songs from that time?

MG: Yes, I can. There's one I'm trying to think of. And one of these ALP members, he was a very old man, and he used to sing it regularly at the functions that they used to have. It was the 'Leader of the Black Velvet Band arose last Labour Day' or something and "Every nation has a flag bar the coons", that was the name of the song, I think, or that's how it finished. It was just trying to show a quality that was not implied.

SR: Can you remember the words, can you go through it?

MG: "The leader of the Black Velvet Band arose last Labour Day and he said to Ross ….. when you were on parade I really feel so much ashamed, I wish I could turn white, for the white men, they march with their banners gay. There on the stands is a German band and the" – to something – "they played, a Scots Brigade, each man arrayed in his two-tone kilt, he marched to Auld Lang Syne. Now, the Irish and the Dutch, they can't guide us so much" – I forget that bit but it finishes up "Ireland waves the harp and shamrock, England waves a lion bold, even China has a dragon and Germany an eagle gold. Bonny Scotland has a thistle, Turkey has a crescent moon" – now, how this come me, I don't know – "but what would the Yankees do for the old red, white and blue, every nation has a flag bar the coon".

104.28 Now, that's one of them that I could think of and there was hundreds and hundreds of others like that, you know.

SR: Really?

MG: A terrible lot of Irish songs were sung.

SR: What can you remember of common sort of illnesses, can you remember what was a common - - -

MG: Yes. Well, the flu was always bad; I mean, somebody'd always be down in the family with the flu in the winter or something like that. There was scarlet fever. The boy that was my uncle that I told you about that died at eighteen - - -

SR: Peritonitis.

MG: - - - peritonitis, yes.

SR: Can you remember any other deaths?

MG: Yes, I remember people dying of – you leave a wound unattended, that wasn't uncommon in those days. You were very frightened to go to South Sydney Hospital. If you went to South Sydney Hospital – this is what the story was as kids – if you went to South Sydney Hospital with a broken leg they'd chop your leg off. But often – although I really shouldn't say that because it finished up a wonderful hospital but often people, boys that'd get their legs broken, playing football, they never seemed to set it right and they'd always have that sort of leg, which today as you can see that uncle of mine penicillin would have cured him in two minutes. They didn't have penicillin.

106.04 **SR: And what were the most popular newspapers?**

MG: I think the *Sydney Morning Herald* was always there.

SR: Was that just in your household?

MG: No, I don't mean here, I mean it was always here in Sydney - - -

SR: Yes.

MG: - - - but it was never in here. I don't think you bought a paper. Later on you'd buy the Mirror or whatever was going there. At one stage the ALP barred the Telegraph, they told their members not to buy the Telegraph and that went on for a number of years because of something Frank Packer had done with Menzies or something and the ALP felt they'd been wronged by it or the leaders of the ALP felt they'd been wronged by it or something and they didn't buy it and that was that.

SR: And were there magazines or comics in the house when you were a kid?

MG: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: What ones?

MG: There was a shop 'round here in Botany Road; you could always go and change your comics, you'd change them.

SR: Right.

MG: I can't think of who they were, Popeye and all of that, Ginger Meggs, all of those. But as to any more than that, I'd be flat-out to remember.

SR: O.K. Can you remember any local criminals?

MG: I'd prefer not to answer that.

SR: What about things like two-up and there was the SP bookie and fine orders.

MG: Yes, all that went on. There was a two-up game they played up the street up here on a Saturday or a Sunday. There were SP bookmakers, three or four on the one street, a couple in every pub. There were card games that they'd play for money. That was a big interest in the various houses, that a group of women'd get together of a night and play cards.

108.03 **SR: Gamble?**

MG: Not for money. They'd have no money but they'd play their cards.

SR: Now, you know how you have these sorts of activities, the two-up and the booking and all that, was that actually considered by the locals as criminal activity?

MG: No.

SR: Yes.

MG: No, no, it was a law but it was never – up till recently it was never carried, it wasn't imposed on people, that people didn't worry about it.

SR: Well, I've heard a lot of stories about police raiding SP bookies and having to pay them off and all that kind of thing.

MG: Yes, yes, yes, you would hear of that, yes, but what I would say what the police was after was the certainty of getting the money once a week.

SR: What were the police like at that time, in the '30s?

MG: Well, they were tougher, if I might say that. They were tougher within themselves. Like I don't mean that they were hardened or anything – but maybe they were a bit hardened – but see if six or seven of you was playing together and they'd say "Haven't you go a home to go to, Mick?", they'd go ……

SR: Even in this street out here, your own street?

MG: Yes, wherever they thought that you were making up to some mischief, not necessarily doing anything, they thought that you may be going to do something, and that sort of thing.

SR: That sounds a bit high-handed.

MG: Yes, or often as they got to know dad and, "Mick, do you want me to take you home to your father?"

SR: That'd be enough, wouldn't it?

MG: Yes, of course, yes. As a matter of fact, I was arrested on one occasion for fighting in the street in an air force uniform and I had a fight with two Yank sailors that wanted to take over the cab that I'd just got into.

110.00 And the three of us were arrested, charged with offensive behaviour and for me to get my bail I had to ring somebody else, I didn't ring here.

SR: Did you ever go on holidays?

MG: Yes, yes. When I say yes, a couple of times, a couple of times. My mother had - a ridiculous place to go on a holiday in the summer, Lidcombe – my mother had a friend that lived at Lidcombe and went up there once or twice but out of the area, no. But when my second eldest sister was young my mother took her a couple of time to friends up at Tamworth or somewhere around there.

SR: What did you know of the outside world outside your local area as a child? So you're talking the '30s.

MG: Are we talking about the world or are we talking about Australia or what?

SR: Well, both, and how aware were you - - -

MG: Very aware, I mean to the lessons at school alone, history and geography, the geography particularly would show you what was happening in the world because at Gardeners Road they did a little bit more than just say "This is an island and so and so lives there", particularly when the war was on the way to starting – hadn't started – but they'd say "This is Germany. The Chancellor of Germany is Adolph Hitler and he's doing this, that and the other" and they always pointed out Japan and warned you of the danger that may come.

SR: Was there a lot of Yellow Peril stuff?

MG: Yes, towards the Japanese, not towards the Chinese, it wasn't Chinese the way I picked it up anyhow; it was never anything but the Yellow Peril was Japan because they'd attacked Manchuria and places like that; they were the ones that were doing the invading.

112.03 And it's funny; Australians don't seem to like anybody invading. It seems then that they are the aggressor, whether they are or not.

Interview ends