



## ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

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**INTERVIEWEE:** Alan Landis

**INTERVIEWER:** Richard Raxworthy

**DATE:** 30 May 2001

**PLACE:?**

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### TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **RR:** This is the Commercial Oral Histories of Central Sydney, the Golf House, talking to Mr Alan Landis. Would you spell your full name for the tape, please?

**AL:** Alan, A-L-A-N. Middle name, Owen, O-W-E-N, Landis, L-A-N-D-I-S.

**RR:** And what year were you born?

**AL:** August, 1955.

**RR:** And where were your family living at that time?

**AL:** In Sydney. Bellevue Hill, Sydney.

**RR:** Now, (phone rings) could you tell me about your grandfather, what his origins were, please?

**AL:** My grandfather came out, was born in Kovno or Chevel in Russia, which is – he's a white Russian. He came out here by ship in the late 1880s and his profession was a tailor and he was supposed to be repairing the sails on board the ship but unfortunately he was sick on the whole voyage so he never repaired the sails at all. He landed in Port Pirie in South Australia, say, about 1888, '89 and he undertook

his profession as a tailor. He would go 'round, I think in a horse and cart, around Broken Hill and outback South Australia and take orders for suits and then go back with the finished product about two weeks later and this was quite successful.

1.16 He married his first wife about 1905 and Abraham, his eldest son, was born – who died in 1984. He also had two other children called Jack and Dora who died in childbirth. His first wife was called Esther Gill; she died at the age of twenty one. After her death he came to Sydney in about 1917, 1918 and he tried to become naturalised but because he was a Russian citizen he wasn't able to become naturalised till after the war. He worked in the premises, later known as 'The Golf House', which at that stage I believe was a pawnshop - or as family records seem to say - and he eventually purchased that business, I believe, about 1921.

He – my grandfather married my grandmother, Millicent Isenberg, I-S-E-N-B-E-R-G, in I think 1919 or 1920 and my – Dora was born – the same two names as the two children that had died, Dora and then Jack. My father was born in May, 1921 and that's as far as I sort of know much about him.

2.41 He had – my father went off to war in 1939 and in the late 1940s my uncle and my grandfather bought a property in Park Street, which became Harry Landis Music, and my uncle - I don't know if you can present this or not – my grandfather was very astute in business – a lot of Europeans were at that time – and he had a property in Links Road in Bowral, he had property at Cammeray, apart from the Golf House and my uncle, Uncle Harry, was born with polio or contracted polio when he was quite young and he later had to have calipers - his legs were fixed up but he always felt that he was hard done by and he got half the property of the Golf House, plus all these other properties actually in Bowral, etcetera, my uncle got all of those. So, that's why half the property of the Golf House was Dad's and half was Uncle Harry's.

3.24 My grandfather, we believe, couldn't read or write and my Uncle Harry – because it was a tradition in the Jewish religion that the eldest son would take on the father's name – as my grandfather couldn't sign his name, Uncle Harry used to go down to the bank and sign the cheques, so he signed them as Harry. That's why, when my grandfather eventually did die – Harry was HA Landis, Harry Abraham Landis, which was Uncle Harry's proper name.

**RR: Now, the Golf House as it is, the building, what do you know of that?**

AL: Right, the building, I believe was built – I think, from memory, there was a date up the top, was 1888 or something like that, 1890 it dated from. Prior to its use as a pawnshop, I couldn't tell you, but it was

changed to the Golf House in 1952. And I know Dad did say to me – and we have some records somewhere - which said that in 1949, when Dad - obviously he was demobbed, he went to – Dad was in New Guinea; he was a surveyor – there was some three year agreement that was done, Dad was working there, and when the three years elapsed, three months before my grandfather died in 1952, but the Golf House was started in 1952. We do have some photographs of the building back in – as a pawnshop in about the early 1920s.

4.43 **RR: I'd like to copy those.**

AL: Right. We do have those – I've got those at home.

**RR: Right. Well, if we can arrange a day when I come in and photograph them here.**

AL: Right, sure. But it became the Golf House in 1952 and Dad's retired from the Golf House in 1982 when my second brother, Robin, took over the business and then later on took in two silent partners, which you know about.

**RR: No, I don't know the names. He didn't tell me.**

AL: Didn't he?

**RR: Yes, he did, sorry.**

AL: I don't know their names, I'm sorry.

**RR: Now, what about Landis Music, Harry Landis Music, wasn't that also in that building next to it? You don't remember?**

AL: Musical instruments were sold in that building at the 220 to 222 Elizabeth Street but my memory, I'm sorry, doesn't go too much about that. We used to go in on school holidays, all my three brothers and I, and repair golf clubs and things out the back.

**RR: What about the houses around the side?**

5.39 AL: I really can't tell you. I know that Anchor Cash Registers were on the other side of the lane.

**RR: No, there's actually three houses, really narrow little houses.**

AL: Yes.

**RR: I'd never seen anything so narrow, which are in the laneway .....**

AL: Probably Robbie would know or my eldest brother, Murray, who is overseas at the moment. He's back in about three weeks' time.

**RR: No. As a matter of fact I asked Robbie and he said that before their time they were let to Chinese.**

AL: I think that sounds right.

**RR: They're so tiny; I don't think many people would put up with it.**

AL: No, I think that sounds correct from vague memory that I have.

**RR: What I was going to ask you is, are those houses older than the front part?**

AL: I honestly couldn't tell you, I just don't know.

**RR: Because the front part is just such a hodgepodge it's very difficult to see what on earth is what.**

6.25 AL: Yes. Yes, yes.

**RR: So, as far as the business is concerned - - -**

AL: Yes.

**RR: - - - the selling of that, how did that go about? I mean, do you have an interest in the business?**

AL: Myself?

**RR: Yes.**

AL: No, no.

**RR: And do you have an interest in the building?**

AL: No, no. Dad owned half the building. It was divided amongst – between Dad and Uncle Harry. In 1968 my father started a golf course in Canberra, which is Capital Golf Course, but that's different from this but which, since they passed away my three brothers and I own that but that's something else.

**RR: Does it pay?**

AL: Not really. It was the first public golf course in Canberra and it's still going. It has its good times and bad times but that's typical of Canberra.

**RR: Now, what about the sign?**

7.18 AL: Right. I believe the sign went up in 1961, 1962. My father had a very good friend called Harry Wittenberg who was the – what do they call it? – agent or whatever for Claude Neon and whether Dad came up with the idea or Harry Wittenberg did, I don't know, and it went up – and Dad received an award and I remember it being on the wall in his office within a year or two of it going up. And we used to get phone calls all the time, people saying some of the globes had gone out, to let Dad know that they had to be fixed and Dad would say that was his night job, to hit the golf ball up there. And he always used to say that if he got in a taxi anywhere and said, “Take me to the Golf House”, that it was a landmark, people knew exactly where it was.

**RR: That sign on the roof, do you know if there was one up on the wall before because in 1961 the description of the sign for the building approval was on a vertical sign in 1961 and then 1966 was a “sky sign”. Now, was the first description wrong? You said it was 1961 it went up?**

8.29 AL: I'm ninety nine per cent sure it was that. Claude Neon should have their records. I don't know how good their records are but Harry Wittenberg has since passed away ten, fifteen years ago. Whether Robbie has that award that Dad had but I'm sure it was up before '66. I'm sure it was '61 or '62. I was born in '55 but I do remember – it's – -

**RR: Lindsay Sharp thinks it was up before there.**

AL: No.

**RR: He reckons in his younger days that it - - -**

AL: No, no, no. People, I think they just see things so regularly that their ideas of dating go a bit fuzzy but I'm pretty sure it was '61 or '62 that it went up.

**RR: And as far as the sale, on-sale of the building, you weren't involved in that at all?**

AL: None whatsoever. It was Robbie, my second brother, was always the son that was going to go into the business of the Golf House. My eldest brother's a solicitor, I'm in antiques, my younger brother's in computing, so none of us were really – and Robbie had done work for .... golf clubs. He worked for PGF in golf, he'd done six months with each of them so he could learn all about golf clubs as he possibly could, so it was always going to be his thing but his love for sailing sort of overtook his interest in golf and that's why – he wanted to do that more and more and so he wasn't so interested in doing the golf side of things. That's why he took in the silent partners but it didn't really work out.

9.57 **RR: And what about you? Could you think of anything else you know about the business or the building that we haven't covered?**

AL: Not really. I know that Dad had a – people could practise golf upstairs, like, a mini golf range: had a net over the top, I remember that, and had a video camera – that was one of the first video cameras I'd ever seen – was there as well. It was one of the first places in Sydney one could buy second hand golf clubs; in fact, it was the biggest second hand golf store in Australia. All the professionals didn't know what to do with their second hand clubs and Dad would be sought out for his knowledge and everything else as well.

**RR: So, it started off as a pawnshop and then on the one side it was sports good and on the other side it was music?**

AL: Yes. So, I think about '52 – I'm not sure exactly – I believe in the late, mid to late forties, my grandfather bought the property in Park Street and my uncle used to have Galapagos Duck playing up on the awning on Saturday afternoons. But I'm pretty sure that's when he bought Park Street and it was the music on one – instruments on one side. And we found my grandfather's passport a few years ago, which dated to 1952, and we contacted Canberra and we got a lot of his background information; that's why we know what his movements were and roughly when he was born.

11.14 **RR: Right, is there anything else?**

AL: Not that I can think of but I'll try and find some photographs or something for you that might sort of help to take some information.

**RR: If I can come in, if you can bring them in here on a date to be appointed and I'll come in and photograph them.**

AL: Right, okay then, sure. I asked one my brothers before, so - well, we meet, usually once a month, my brothers, so if it's not – I don't know how urgent this is but if - - -

**RR: Well, I'm supposed to have it in by the 18<sup>th</sup> but that's not the final date.**

AL: No, but if we can – my eldest brother's overseas till the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, so if we got together before then, the four of us, and maybe bring some information together and I can bring that in for you.

**RR: I'll come in and get the camera out and what have you.**

AL: Because I know that – it was just disappointing – they had this discussion on 2BL recently where no one mentioned my father at all in relation to the sign, whereas he was sort of so highly respected for a long, long time.

RR: **Yes, I know. It's amazing that but the fact remains that, I mean, the only reason I knew you – so on the off-chance I rang you and said, "Are you any relation to"?**

AL: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

RR: **And there we are from there.**

AL: Yes, right.

RR: **You know, and nobody knew anything about it before that. I mean, I suppose if I'd phoned Lindsay Sharp he would have told me.**

12.24 AL: Possibly some of it.

RR: **Because I already have recorded him.**

AL: Right.

RR: **But you know at that time I didn't know about him either.**

AL: No, no. Because he \*\*\*\*\* and that's why he sold the building, actually, to David. I don't know if you knew that.

RR: **I thought he sold half to David. No?**

AL: Yes, because David -, that's right, he sold the other half that he bought from Robbie, he sold to David. So, David owned it outright and then David sold the whole lot to Ray Drummond.

RR: **Well, he says he doesn't own it but it's a business called Trinvas.**

AL: That must be Ray Drummond's business, I don't know.

RR: **No, I think it's not. I think it's Richard Spanos' business name.**

AL: No, I don't think it is.

RR: **All right. Well, thank you very much Alan Landis.**

13.09 AL: My pleasure.

**Interview ends**