



COMMERCE AND WORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Ilse Huber

Date: 21 August 2009

Place: Elizabeth Bay

Interviewer: Roslyn Burge

Recorder: Ediol

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **RB:** This is an interview with Mrs Ilse Huber at her home in Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay on Friday, 21 August 2009. The interview is being recorded as part of the City of Sydney's Oral History Project, Commerce and Work in the City of Sydney and the interviewer is Roslyn Burge.

Isle, thank you for giving us your time today.

IH: It's a pleasure.

RB: Just for the record, would you like to give me your full name and your date and place of birth?

IH: Ilse, which is spelled I-L-S-E and Huber, H-U-B-E-R, and I was born in ***** Austria on the ***** 1924

RB: So, you've just had a birthday?

IH: Yes.

RB: A very special birthday.

IH: Yes, so they say, yes.

RB: And you made a roundabout trip from Austria, you didn't come straight here?

IH: No, I didn't. I went to live in England at the beginning of 1939 when I was fourteen and lived there during the war and came here in 1948.

RB: And there's a lot of history in that small strip of time as well.

IH: A lot of history, yes, there is.

RB: You were working in England for a time?

IH: I was working for the Halle Orchestra in Manchester. We have travelled all over England, giving concerts, and I was employed in – what do you call this? – I forget, I can't think. Just a moment. In an administrative position, that's what I meant to say. And I was quite young.

RB: How did you get that job?

1.59 IH: I got it through the newspaper. It was in the *Manchester Guardian*, there was an advertisement and I applied and got the job. And, at first, my English wasn't that good when I first came to England so I had to learn as I went along and by the time I joined the Halle Concert Society I was more or less speaking English quite well. And I loved meeting all the famous musicians of the day. Sir John Barbirolli was the conductor and before that Malcolm Sargent – I don't know whether you know those.

RB: I do.

IH: Yes. And, yes, it was a most enjoyable work.

RB: And you travelled around the UK as well with the orchestra?

IH: Yes, with the orchestra, yes, I did.

RB: You were looking after ticket bookings then?

IH: Yes, ticket bookings and I have to look after the musicians' accommodation, wherever they went in England and make sure that they swallowed a sandwich in between rehearsals and so forth. Yes, no, it was a job that I would always love to do again if I were young enough.

RB: What brought you out to Australia?

IH: My husband's parents had emigrated to Australia, also from Vienna, and so we came here to join them.

RB: Is Huber your maiden name or your married name?

IH: My married name, yes.

RB: What was your maiden name?

IH: Vorgang.

RB: How do you spell that?

IH: V-O-R-G-A-N-G, Vorgang, it's pronounced Forgung in German.

RB: So, you were married in the UK and came here with your husband?

IH: Yes, yes, and my little boy, yes.

4.02 **RB: And did you come to Sydney first?**

IH: Yes. Yes, my parents in law lived in Lane Cove; this is where we first went to live.

RB: And what did you expect to find here?

IH: Peace and a freshening and, yes, a new life.

RB: And did you live long in Lane Cove?

IH: No. No, I didn't. My husband and I parted soon after we came to Australia and from then onwards I lived in Kensington and in Bellevue Hill and in Kings Cross which was where all the Europeans flocked during those days, 1948, and Elizabeth Bay ever since then.

RB: Goodness. Do you remember which year you came to live in Elizabeth Bay?

IH: Yes, in 1969.

RB: As late as '69?

IH: Yes. Or actually already '68, in 1968 it was.

RB: But you were working in the area well before then.

IH: Oh yes.

RB: Where were you first working?

IH: At the very beginning I worked for a film laboratory, learning to splice films.

RB: Where was that?

IH: That was in Surry Hills and it was called the 'Commonwealth Film Laboratory'.

RB: That was a very big organisation.

5.54 IH: I think so, yes. And later I worked in a restaurant. I was learning to be a restaurateur but at that time I was completely inexperienced as far as restaurants were concerned and a man by the name of Fritz Straden who came from Vienna originally opened this restaurant here in Sydney and he asked me to come and work for him. I explained that I had no experience in restaurants at all. He said, "Oh, I'll teach you, don't worry", and that's how my restaurant life began.

RB: How did you know Fritz?

IH: I met him – he picked me up at the telephone. We had to have public telephones in those days; you know, we didn't have telephones like we have now and I was waiting to speak on the phone and he was in front of me and he motioned me to go ahead, before him. And I thanked him and he said, "You are not Australian" and I said, "No, I'm not". "Where are you from?" "From Vienna", he said, "So am I. Look, I'm opening a restaurant right here. It's going to be called 'The Fiaker'" - the Fiaker means the horse-drawn cabbie in Vienna - and "come and work for me". And I said, "Oh, I know nothing about it", "I'll teach you", and so that's how it started.

RB: Do you remember where the phone box was?

IH: I certainly do. Right outside the Kings Cross Fire Station in Darlinghurst Road, yes.

RB: And the restaurant, where was that?

IH: Right opposite the fire station in Kings Cross, in Darlinghurst Road, yes.

RB: So, were you already in another job when you came to his restaurant?

IH: Yes, yes, I was working in the film laboratory.

RB: And you were living nearby?

8.00 IH: Yes.

RB: Whereabouts?

IH: In Darlington Road, Kings Cross.

RB: So, your world was very much Darlington Road.

IH: Yes, yes. And when I think of it now when I go past I often think, "How amazing. Over sixty years have passed since I've lived here and I'm still hanging around the same area".

RB: What was the address, the number in Darlington Road where you lived?

IH: 167 Darlington Road. Now there is nothing there, it's a road that cars drive over onto William Street, from the eastern suburbs onto William Street and I always say "That car has just gone over my bed", over my previous bed.

RB: What were your first impressions, starting at the restaurant?

IH: That's a little bit hard to remember. It's a long time ago.

RB: You said you no experience.

IH: No, I had no experience. I was serving at table and making entrées and Fritz Straden showed me how to do these things, yes.

RB: What sort of entrees were you making?

IH: Chopped chicken liver, Russian egg.

RB: What's a Russian egg?

IH: A Russian egg is boiled eggs and the yolks from the boiled eggs mashed up with mayonnaise and then put back onto the half egg. I don't know whether I explained this very well.

RB: Yes, I know exactly what you mean.

IH: Yes, and a little bit of Russian caviar on top.

RB: Is this a Viennese specialty?

IH: I guess it's a Russian specialty, yes.

10.00 **RB: Russian specialty, of course. And what other items were served for entrée?**

IH: Oh, Bismarck Herring, oh, lots of different things – I can't remember to tell you the truth; it's a long time ago.

RB: It is, it is.

IH: Yes.

RB: I think what people eat at a particular time tells you a lot about that community at that time as well.

IH: Well, you remember I told you that I had a book full of photographs and in it is also a menu card from the Fiaker Restaurant.

RB: So, perhaps we might have a look at that later.

IH: Yes, yes, by all means.

RB: Who did most of the cooking?

IH: Mr Straden. He was an excellent chef and although he had been an actor in Vienna his cooking was wonderful and he liked to show people what he was doing: it was as though he was still on the stage. He was in his kitchen and the kitchen was partitioned off by a large glass plate so that he could be seen up there near the stove with his hat, chef's hat on and that was his domain.

RB: Was that unusual for the time?

IH: Yes. Oh, yes, it was very unusual because when I first arrived in Australia most food that you got served in restaurants were steak and eggs or, you know, something typically Australian and this was something very typically European.

RB: Were there many restaurants around at the time?

IH: No, no, there were not. It was one of the first European restaurants in Kings Cross, yes.

RB: Were there other restaurants along that strip of Darlinghurst Road?

12.03 IH: Not in Darlinghurst Road itself. There were some restaurants in Kings Cross Road and in Bayswater Road, not directly in Darlinghurst Road; that was the only one, yes.

RB: What sort of clientele came to The Fiaker?

IH: Mainly European, Austrian and German refugees who had come to Australia before then and who lived in various parts of Sydney but had shops in Kings Cross or in the city and when they finished at five thirty the first place they would go to would be the Fiaker Restaurant to have dinner and then go home because they had been working all day. And those were, I would say, the main part of our clientele was Austrian and German and later on Hungarian and Czechoslovakian and of course Australian as well.

RB: Were they the minority?

IH: At the beginning they were but, you know.

RB: So, did you start at the restaurant as Fritz opened the restaurant?

IH: Well, he originally opened the restaurant and then unfortunately after about a year Mr Straden, who was very emotional, committed suicide and after that his son wanted to sell the restaurant and he did and I was then taking it on to manage and from then onwards I was a restaurateur.

14.02 **RB: So, you were actually in the same physical location as The Fiaker?**

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: Did you change the décor when you took it over?

IH: No. No, we didn't.

RB: You took it straight over from Mr Straden?

IH: Yes.

RB: And did you change the name?

IH: No. No, Fiaker was a very good Austrian name for an Austrian restaurant, yes.

RB: Were you doing the cooking by this time?

IH: I cooked the entrées and I made the cakes, baked tortes and so on but I didn't do the cooking; we had a chef, different chefs at different times.

RB: Do any names stand out?

IH: Yes, yes, they do. One was Charlie – no, I can't think of it just now. I might come back to it.

RB: And where were you living at this time?

IH: Still at the same address in Darlinghurst Road because it was close to the restaurant.

RB: And had your clientele shifted by this time?

IH: How do you mean?

RB: Did you bring different people to the restaurant?

IH: Well, gradually people got to know the restaurant and became regular customers but the restaurant was too small for all the people that wanted to come and eat there so I had to find a larger restaurant and I did and I called it the 'Blue Danube'.

RB: Before we come to the Blue Danube, how many people did you seat at The Fiaker?

IH: Thirty seven.

RB: That's a fair size still.

15.59 IH: No, it was not very large. It was narrow and long and had a few steps leading up to an upper part and the kitchen and the new restaurant had a hundred seats, yes.

RB: That's a lot more.

IH: Quite a lot larger, yes.

RB: And again before we leave the Fiaker was there any particular décor that you recall?

IH: We had photographs of Viennese; well-known places in Vienna on the walls, yes.

RB: And you talk about doing the baking for the cakes. Did you do that in the restaurant?

IH: Yes, I did.

RB: It must have been a squash.

IH: We managed. It was a small kitchen but we still managed, yes.

RB: What sort of tortes would you make?

IH: Oh, we would make Sachertorte and we would make Malakoff Torte.

RB: What's a Malakoff Torte?

IH: A Malakoff Torte is a cake that contains cognac. There was supposed to be a Russian general who apparently liked cognac very much and it was named after him.

RB: Were there any cakes that were favourites in the restaurant and sold out faster than everything else?

IH: Oh yes. There was – well, translated into English it would be called a moose head.

RB: And what was that?

IH: Well, it was a concoction of a very light pastry, two pieces that were made to fit together (demonstrates visually). In between was whipped cream and on top was chocolate and that is called an Indiana Kropfmin – in other words an Indian head but moose head is more suitable in my translation.

18.00 **RB: As you described it to me your hands moved to describe the shape of it.**

IH: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

RB: It suggests you've made that many times.

IH: Yes.

RB: And what about the supplies for The Fiaker – where were they sourced from?

IH: From nearby shops. I remember more about the supplies to the Blue Danube because this is when I did the buying for the restaurant after Mr Straden died. And supplies, there was on the corner of Roslyn Street, your street, there was a fish shop and we got all our oysters and fish from there.

RB: Do you remember the name of the shop?

IH: No, I'm afraid not.

RB: I'm sorry to keep asking you, do you remember this that and the other?

IH: No.

RB: Just a hope.

IH: It's after all over sixty years.

RB: I know, I know. It's a great demand upon you.

IH: And there was a deli in Darlinghurst Road, an Italian deli and I used to buy a lot of my groceries from there. And there was a greengrocer on the corner of Darlinghurst Road and Macleay Street; I got all my fruit and vegetables from there. And meat, yes meat, Handler's Butchery, Handler, and I think they are still in business today.

RB: Is that in this district?

IH: I think it's in Rushcutters Bay.

RB: So you really didn't leave the area?

IH: No, I didn't.

RB: Never to Paddy's Market or Chinatown?

IH: No. No, not at all.

RB: And what about alcohol – did you serve alcohol in the restaurant?

20.03 IH: No, we didn't. No, not in The Fiaker Restaurant. That was a restaurant where people just ate and left. It was just, you know, a quick meal and then they went home; they had been working all day. But in the Blue Danube Restaurant we did serve some alcohol but it had to be ordered before six o'clock and then one had to go out and purchase it and put it in the refrigerator and put a label onto the bottle with the customer's name on it and it was not a very happy time for restaurateurs. And, as I said, quite a few restaurants in existence at that time did go out of business.

RB: When you say "not a happy time" what do you mean?

IH: Well, the vice squad [former special police squad] used to come around and try and get you to serve them some alcohol and pay for it and then they would confiscate all the alcohol on the premises and fine you and so forth and of course that was not a very good time. People who came to the Blue Danube Restaurant were used to having a glass of wine with their meal and it was a very, very quiet pleasant clientele and there was never any noise or anything unpleasant going on so for them to have to order wine in advance was virtually unheard of.

21.55 They used to be able to come to what once upon a time the Blue Danube - before it was the Blue Danube was called Glen Eagles and later Grey Eagles and it was a very – oh, I'm going to sneeze.

RB: You've eclipsed it.

IH: Yes.

RB: The Grey Eagles.

IH: The Grey Eagles was the restaurant; it was called Grey Eagles when I took it on, when I first started in that restaurant.

RB: Which year are we talking about for this?

IH: 1949.

RB: So, you were really just a year - - -

IH: 1950? 1950.

RB: So, you were about a year with The Fiaker?

IH: Fiaker, yes, yes.

RB: And then 1950?

IH: Yes.

RB: So, what made you decide to take over the Blue Danube or the Grey Eagles as it was then?

IH: The fact that I needed the larger restaurant. I went in search of larger premises and this restaurant had been closed for six months and was available and I rented it.

RB: So, how does one find a restaurant?

IH: How did one find it?

RB: How do you find a restaurant, how do you go shopping for a restaurant, how did you do that then?

IH: Well, I knew that this restaurant was vacant and I went to see the people who owned it and asked them if I could rent it from them and they agreed and I did.

RB: Who were they?

IH: They were a Lebanese couple, a lady by the name of Bitar, Mrs Bitar and her partner called Zenfil, Mr Zenfil. Lebanese people, yes. They owned the building and they had not been running the restaurant and

it had been in quite a bad state of repair and I had to get all that fixed up before I could start.

24.06 **RB: Was that a long process?**

IH: It took about three months for me to make it inhabitable, yes.

RB: What sort of décor did you set about installing there?

IH: Well, it was winter and I remember we had paintings done, murals done of Austrian countries with pine trees and snow-capped mountains and they were attached to the wall, and, yes, I won't have any to show you because, I mean, they finally torn and were thrown away but that was the décor we had for quite some time. And otherwise there was no décor except very beautiful, plush, burgundy coloured curtains and a little dance floor and very attractive lighting, soft lighting.

RB: What sort of lighting?

IH: It was sort of flame coloured lighting they called it. They used to call it flame, the colour was called flame, of the globe, and it was a soft lighting and we had soft background music and a three-piece little orchestra; there was one musician who played seven instruments; he was a Hungarian, yes, yes. And, yes, there were some very good musicians.

RB: What was the three-piece group called – did it have a particular name?

26.01 IH: It was just the 'Blue Danube Trio'.

RB: So they were there all the time?

IH: Not all the time; they were there for a few hours every evening, yes.

RB: What time would you open?

IH: For dinner at six o'clock, at six o'clock, yes.

RB: And what time would you close?

IH: Oh, any time, often at four o'clock in the morning.

RB: Four o'clock.

IH: Yes, as long as people were there, yes.

RB: Would that be during the weekend, those sorts of hours, or was this during the week as well?

IH: Mostly at the weekend. Well, we were open the whole week, seven days, but it was very busy at the weekend, not so busy during the week.

RB: You talked about the lighting. Was that wall lighting, niche lighting or central or table lamps?

IH: There were small candleholders, candle, and I might show you the pictures.

RB: O.K.

IH: Because it might show it on there.

RB: With a little sort of cap, as it were, on the candle?

IH: It was a little lampshade; I had little lampshades made in silk, in pink and burgundy coloured silk. [Break in recording]

RB: So, you're now looking at the menu card for The Fiaker.

IH: Well, there we have some soup, chicken soup, and Bismarck Herring, veal in aspic as an entrée.

27.57 Main courses were Hungarian goulash with dumplings, five and ninepence, and the entrées were two and sixpence. Roast beef with rice was six and ninepence, Frankfurter Braten with dumplings, six and ninepence, roast pork, roast chicken and Wienerschnitzel we'd sell it, Wiener Rostbraten with rice.

RB: What's Rostbraten?

IH: Well, it is like a steak – it is a steak, actually, Rostbraten, yes.

RB: Is it the way you prepare it or a sauce?

IH: No, it's very plain. Onions, you usually put onions, sliced onions on top, fried onions. Wienerschnitzel, side serve of mushrooms. And for dessert chocolate cream, two shillings, Pariser Torte with cream, two and sixpence or stewed fruit for a dollar – for a shilling, not a dollar. Or coffee was one and threepence and demitasse was ninepence.

RB: What sort of coffee did you serve?

IH: We served Viennese coffee.

RB: Instant coffee?

IH: Pardon me?

RB: Was it instant?

IH: No, no, it wasn't, it was percolated coffee, yes.

RB: Do you mind if we leave the tape on?

IH: [Looking at photographs] Yes, by all means. This was outside the Rex Hotel where you could have – it was the first place where they served coffee outside in Macleay Street and it was called, 'The Boulevard'.

30.03 **RB: You can see The Boulevard, yes.**

IH: The Boulevard, that's right.

RB: Would you go there often?

IH: Yes, yes, I did, yes.

RB: So, this article in 'The Woman' of April 28, 1952 is all about restaurants.

IH: All about restaurants, that's right. 'Eating Out', it was called.

RB: Did you promote the restaurant yourselves or did they come to you?

IH: I think people came to us; you know, once they knew the restaurant was there, they came. We used to, I suppose, at the beginning advertise but - - -

RB: This restaurant run by a giant who weighs twenty one - - -

IH: Pardon - a giant?

RB: Run by a giant who weighs twenty one stone.

IH: Which one was that?

RB: Emil Koroschenko.

IH: Koroschenko, yes, yes, yes, yes.

RB: Where was that?

IH: I think it was in Kings Cross Road, yes, Kings Cross Road.

RB: So, were these all restaurants in the vicinity of your own?

IH: Yes. Well, most restaurants were at that time at Kings Cross, yes. Yes, Harry's Café de Wheels.

RB: That's lasted.

IH: Yes. And there is the Blue Danube down here; that was the Blue Danube.

RB: It's quite a big building. It's got the Russell – is it Russell? – and the Potts Point Newsagency.

IH: Oh, there used to be a newsagent next door, yes, that's right, yes.

RB: So, what was the rest of the building used for?

IH: Well, Glen Eagles as it was called before had at one stage been a nursing home, and later it became a hotel and downstairs was the Glen Eagles Restaurant.

32.04 **RB: You mentioned before, Ilse, that the Old Vic would stay there.**

IH: That's right, in the Glen Eagles, yes, they did.

RB: So, was the Blue Danube ever there when it was also a hotel, so you would service the customers then?

IH: Well, there was a hotel upstairs but it was not connected with the restaurant, it was separate.

RB: What was the name of that hotel?

IH: Grey Eagles.

RB: The Grey Eagles Hotel.

IH: Grey Eagles, yes.

RB: "Candlelight and capsicum in the Blue Danube". This is wonderful.

IH: This is a humorous article about the restaurant.

RB: This isn't you?

IH: No.

RB: 'Karen Barr', no.

IH: No. She came with her little dog; she was trying to feed him oysters.

RB: Was that a regular thing?

IH: And, you know, she was the girlfriend of Peter Russell Clarke and now there is still a Peter Russell Clarke: that's his son. Yes, he is also a chef, yes.

RB: Then you've got this very elegant, huge photo. Was that advertising?

IH: Yes, yes, it was.

RB: So, what's the woman eating here?

IH: Oysters by the looks of it, I think. And this was our Christmas tree. I had the grand piano here and I used to have a Christmas tree. And here were some of the musicians and the waiters. These were two Czechoslovakian waiters and two Hungarian musicians.

RB: So, their names, the musicians are Charlie Papp.

IH: Yes, Papp, yes.

RB: George.

IH: Yes.

RB: Do you remember his surname, the waiter?

IH: I should but I can't think of it.

RB: Pepe, the other waiter, and Andrew in 1953.

34.00 IH: Andrew, a musician, yes.

RB: And you're dressed in a very elegant frock, Ilse.

IH: Yes, I did used to have some very nice dresses. They were made by a Viennese dressmaker in Craigend Street and she called herself 'Madame Lilly' - she made beautiful things. Here was a menu card from the Glen Eagles, the original Glen Eagles Restaurant.

RB: Yes. Gosh, look at these pictures.

IH: Yes.

RB: That's quite an international -

IH: Oh, yes.

RB: French, New Zealand, English, with all these little pictures to explain it – I love it.

IH: And these were Christmas and New Year menu cards from the Blue Danube.

RB: You never closed on Christmas Day?

IH: No.

RB: Did you have many people come?

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: Were these people locals who patronised you - - -

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: - - - or Viennese specially?

IH: No, mostly Australian people.

RB: “Young roast goose. Ham burgundy”. Who did the cooking at this time?

IH: Different chefs, we had different chefs. We had once a Polish chef and then we had an American chef once and different chefs.

RB: I have nothing to do with the restaurant trade but you hear that they're sometimes temperamental.

IH: Oh, yes. Either temperamental or they drink too much, yes, or they're bad tempered. This was done by a Russian. He was a guest at the restaurant and he was very good at drawing and he drew this and drew the menu card by hand.

36.01 **RB: Is it for New Years Eve 1953?**

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: And here's your trio.

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: They're more than a trio.

IH: More than a trio.

RB: Three, four, five.

IH: He worked for – I don't know whether you've heard of Romano's Restaurant?

RB: Yes.

IH: Well, he worked at the Romano's as a pianist, he's Bela Kunitz.

RB:

IH: Yes. And after he finished there he would come up to the Cross to play at the Blue Danube; they have jam sessions.

RB: How fantastic.

IH: Yes, and they played till all hours.

RB: Is this his name?

IH: Bela Kunitz is this one, yes.

RB: Bela Kunitz.

IH: He went to South America later.

RB: So, there must have been a fantastic atmosphere.

IH: Oh, it was, it was.

RB: What made it so great?

IH: Well, a combination of things, I suppose. Good food - the atmosphere was very conducive to pleasant, quiet, romantic atmosphere. Yes, I think and the music, you know, not too loud and you always had to be there to keep an eye on everything, including the atmosphere. Like, for example, if the music stopped, if the musicians went away for a break I was there to make sure that I immediately put on the radiogram to have continued music. That's very important, to keep an atmosphere even.

RB: Would people come there looking for you as well, looking for you to be there as the hostess?

IH: I suppose so, yes, because people knew that I was there, so.

RB: You must have known a tremendous number of people in Sydney.

37.56 IH: Yes, yes, I did. And these were guests. (indicates visually) He's now a barrister I'd say but he's probably retired by now. And he used to

come there with his wife. And this is myself. I'm looking different everywhere.

RB: Very glamorous. And you've got a painting on the wall behind you.

IH: This is what I was referring to before; those were these murals.

RB: Yes.

IH: You spotted it, I didn't.

RB: And there's one there in the corner.

IH: Yes, that's right.

RB: Would you rather have this up on the table? It might be easier for you?

IH: No, no, no. No, it's fine for me.

RB: And candles, tall candles.

IH: Yes, but they were usually the candles had a little lampshade on them. Here, see this lampshade?

RB: Yes.

IH: Well, I had miniature lampshades like that over the candles.

RB: Were they pleated as well like this?

IH: Yes, yes, yes.

RB: That's a very expensive item.

IH: It's nice.

RB: These are fantastic photographs. And your little teapot and sugar pot, were they labelled for the restaurant, had the restaurant name on it?

IH: Yes, yes, I remember they did. I still have silver trays with the restaurant.

RB: Do you?

IH: Yes.

RB: And here there's a painting of a woman, I think, on the wall?

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: And are these -?

IH: This was myself. These were friends, a French couple.

RB: Do you remember who they were?

IH: Yes, Monsieur and Madame Brocier.

RB: Residents of Sydney?

IH: Partially. They used to come to Sydney but they lived in the New Hebrides, they lived in Vila.

RB: Is this uncomfortable for you to turn around?

IH: No, no, no, I'm fine. I can sit down. No, it's fine. This was our accountant in the restaurant.

RB: Who was that?

40.00 IH: This man. That's an accountant but it's a long time ago - I don't remember his name.

RB: And what's at the Roosevelt – where's that?

IH: The Roosevelt was a nightclub here in – what is that first street when you come from Darlinghurst Road onto Macleay Street and the first street to the left?

RB: Victoria?

IH: Where the Metro is now. Well, there was the Metro.

RB: I'm not familiar with all the streets. I know Victoria Road.

IH: Victoria Street.

RB: Victoria Street.

IH: Yes. No, Darlinghurst Road, you know Darlinghurst Road, the main street in the Cross?

RB: Yes.

IH: You get to the corner of Macleay Street when you come, say, from the train station in Kings Cross.

RB: I don't know the street names that well, I'm afraid.

IH: No. Darlington Road is the main street in the Cross.

RB: Yes.

IH: And as you come along to the corner of Macleay Street you turn left and the first street to the left is called not Ormond but something rather similar.

RB: Orwell.

IH: Orwell, exactly. Orwell Street. This is where the Roosevelt Restaurant was.

RB: So, would you go there after your own restaurant had closed or is this on a separate evening?

IH: Very rarely on a day – only when I was not working, on a day then perhaps I would go.

RB: Look at everybody smoking as well.

IH: Yes, oh, yes, yes.

RB: Did you enjoy the Blue Danube?

IH: I did, I did but it was very hard work. And you have – this is the Russian crocodile hunter who came there with his partner.

RB: Is that Alex Lendl?

42.00 IH: Yes, yes, this is Alex Lendl. And he brought me back a little crocodile and put it on my lap.

RB: You have a different outfit in every photograph.

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: Was it necessary to have an extensive wardrobe?

IH: No, but there were seven days in a week. I had to have something on every day.

RB: And this one, Charlie Papp and Felix Wiener, who were they?

IH: Charlie Papp was this musician who played seven instruments; he's the one, Hungarian.

RB: He's playing an accordion here.

IH: Accordion, yes, yes, yes.

RB: Would he wander around the restaurant?

IH: Yes, he did, yes. And Felix Wiener was a friend of mine. He still lives somewhere near Lithgow.

RB: Is this a vase here?

IH: I think so.

RB: It's a very elegant vase.

IH: Yes.

RB: Did you decorate the restaurant yourself?

IH: Well, I used to decorate it. We just had usually gladiolus on the mantelpiece. There were two fireplaces, one in the front room and one in the back room; there were two rooms that were interconnected.

RB: It must have been late in the evening in this photograph. The candles are practically down to the stick.

IH: Yes, it could be.

RB: And here, you've got alcohol here.

IH: Yes.

RB: So, did you have a licence at this time?

IH: No, no, we didn't. We had to have a label on it with the name of the person who ordered it, yes.

RB: So antiquated.

IH: Something new in an old place, the Blue Danube Restaurant.

RB: These are wonderful.

43.56 IH: This was a funny article which was written by a newspaper reporter who – upstairs, as I mentioned was a hotel and there was also a bar upstairs and this man went to the bar and then wrote an article about it called, 'I was lumbered in for that quiet after-hour drink'. It's quite funny. If you want to read it, by all means do.

RB: Look at this in this article from the paper you've got here, 'The Negresto Coffee Lounge in Bayswater Road'.

IH: Yes. The Tabou - - -

RB: The Tabou.

IH: - - - Coffee Restaurant was in the same building on the other side where I showed that photo of the - - -

RB: Of the Glen Eagles?

IH: - - - of the Glen Eagles, here. The Tabou was on this side. The Blue Danube, there was the entrance, and the Taboo was on that side.

RB: On the left side.

IH: You can't see it too well here. And the Blue Danube – there is the neon sign – was here.

RB: Yes.

IH: It still exists.

RB: Does it?

IH: Yes, still exists, yes, that section. But this is the Bourbon – they call it 'The Bourbon' – used to be called 'Bourbon & Beefsteak'.

RB: It's there. I thought you were opposite the fire station.

IH: That was the Fiaker Restaurant.

RB: The Fiaker.

IH: This was the Fiaker.

RB: So, what number – this is in Macleay Street?

IH: I thought it was 24 Macleay Street if I'm not mistaken. Darlinghurst Road rather I should say, it was Darlinghurst Road.

RB: What was the Taboo serving?

IH: It was mostly coffee and later they had a dance floor and they made it into a little nightclub, yes.

46.00 **RB: And people would dance in your restaurant as well?**

IH: Yes, oh, yes, yes.

RB: When I came before I mentioned fleetingly Henri and Jeanne Renault who had - - -

IH: Yes, from the Hermitage.

RB: Yes.

IH: Yes, yes, yes.

RB: So, would you restaurateurs visit each other's establishments?

IH: Yes, yes, we would, yes.

RB: And you worked in the Hermitage as well.

IH: After I closed down my restaurant I worked for, I think, three months in the Hermitage and I remember Madame Renault and her husband, yes, very well.

RB: Where were they then – was it Ash Street?

IH: It was, yes, where Angel Place is now, yes.

RB: Yes.

IH: Yes, that's right.

RB: And what was the atmosphere of that restaurant?

IH: It was a very pleasant atmosphere. They had mostly lunchtime business and it was always packed out; you had to book to go there. And there were paintings from floor to ceiling.

RB: Were there?

IH: You know, Hermitage.

RB: Yes, yes. So, when did you wind up the Blue Danube?

IH: At the end of '54.

RB: May I ask why?

IH: Well, because it was too difficult to run with the licensing laws that were in force at the time.

RB: And without prying into your affairs too deeply, was it a successful business?

47.45 IH: It was successful inasmuch as it was very popular because the food was good and the atmosphere was very pleasant but it was not successful because of the liquor laws and it became too hard to run because you had to worry all the time about whether you were doing the right thing or not and whether you were going to be haunted by the vice squad. So, I decided to close down which was very sad because to this day I meet people who say, "Oh, I wish the Blue Danube would still be around".

RB: Do they?

IH: Yes, yes.

RB: So, if you go to an event in the Cross or around town and people learn that you ran the restaurant do you come across people who remember it?

IH: I do. As a matter of fact I was at Double Bay a few days ago at the '21 Espresso' and the owner of that espresso, Mr Fischer, was there and he was telling me that he used to come to the Blue Danube and he enjoyed it so much. Yes, and I promised I would bring him this album to look at.

RB: Yes, it's wonderful.

IH: Yes.

RB: How did you feel when you closed?

IH: Sad, very sad.

RB: And what did you move on to do next?

IH: Next.

RB: I'm impatient to know your career. There are a couple of other questions I want to ask you about the restaurant – I'll come back to that – but you probably wanted a holiday at that point.

49.48 IH: When I was at the Blue Danube I was very tired; I was working very hard; I worked seven days a week and all hours. I used to start at ten in the morning to do my buying.

RB: You mentioned before for Fiaker that you bought the items locally. Was that the same for the Blue Danube?

IH: Yes, yes, it was, yes; most of it was bought locally.

RB: And there were more staff to manage?

IH: More -?

RB: Staff, you had more people?

IH: Yes, of course. Yes, oh, yes.

RB: Was it a big staff?

IH: Well, not terribly big but I had two waiters and a chef - a first chef and a second chef – and myself to do the entrées and the cakes and, yes, the usual staff that you have in a kitchen, kitchen staff, yes.

RB: Were they all men?

IH: No, some of them were women. I had once the waitress and I had a kitchen woman working in the kitchen.

RB: What does a kitchen woman do?

IH: Oh, she peels vegetables and washes dishes and, you know, general kitchen work in a restaurant.

RB: I see in some of the photos, Ilse, that you had tablecloths.

IH: Yes.

RB: Were they sent out or did you look after those?

IH: Oh, no, they were sent out. Yes, they were sent out, yes - white tablecloths.

RB: And you speak about the tortes that you made. Do you still bake today?

IH: Sometimes, sometimes.

RB: Do you enjoy it?

51.46 IH: I do but, you know, my back is not what it used to be and it takes a lot of standing. As a matter of fact, I have made a cake recently for my birthday – it was not so long ago – and this cake is the one, the Malakoff Torte, and I still have a piece in the fridge but I have to make sure that it is still good and if it is I shall offer you a piece.

RB: That's very nice. Well, with all the cognac it should be good for a good year.

IH: Well, I hope so, I hope so.

RB: Would you like a little break?

IH: Yes, I think that would be nice.

Interview ends