



ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Lindsay Sharp

INTERVIEWER: Richard Raxworthy

DATE: 29 May 2001

PLACE: Royal Sydney Golf Club

TRANSCRIPT

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

LS: Yes, it's L-I-N-D-S-A-Y S-H-A-R-P.

RR: No E?

LS: No E.

RR: I'm caught out again. Today is the 29th, isn't it, of May 2001, and we're at the Royal Sydney Golf Club and this is Richard Raxworthy interviewing. What year were you born, Mr Sharp?

LS: I was born in 1946.

RR: And whereabouts were your parents living then?

LS: In Kogarah.

RR: Did you grow up there?

LS: Yes, I did. I've actually spent most of my life at Roselands in Sydney.

RR: Did you go to school there?

LS: I went to school at Beverly Hills Primary and Narwee Boys High.

RR: And where from there?

LS: Then I decided I was going to be a professional golfer and I did my apprenticeship at Ashlar Golf Club at Blacktown and turned professional in 1965.

RR: And when did you start becoming a professional at a golf course?

1.23 LS: Well, I actually ran the Canterbury Public Golf Course for Canterbury Council from 1967 and I stayed there and I also played the tour in Europe and Australia until about 1978, when I went to Bexley Golf Club and I was the pro there until 1985, when I took over the Golf House.

RR: And can you tell me the story of the Golf House as you know it from when you first heard about it, right through?

LS: Well, I always knew about it because it was always there from the time I can ever remember and Jack Landis, who was the owner of the Golf House in those days - I was the professional at Bexley Golf Club, I also had another two off-course stores; one at Blakehurst and one at Sans Souci, and Jack used to come around and buy, or look for, all the odd second-hand clubs that he needed to fill in sets and whatever and we just became friends, we chatted. And then Jack had to sell the Golf House because he needed to refinance his golf course down in Canberra, the Capital Golf Club, and he sold it to his son, Robbie, and two other investors, and that really didn't work out because ***** . And when the lease was up Jack asked me would I like to take it over and which I did in December, 1985.

2.49 **RR: And from then on?**

LS: Well, from then on I ran it all the way through until I sold it in November, '99, yes.

RR: So, what do you know about the building?

LS: Well, I don't know a great deal about it. I knew that Jack and Harry owned it jointly and then when Harry Landis died it was left to his son, David. So, I bought Jack Landis' share in about '92 and so David and I owned it jointly until we were made an offer to sell it in about '96, so - and we thought it was about time we did, so that was how that all came about.

RR: Who did you sell it to?

LS: We sold it to a company called Trinvas Pty Ltd and I think their idea was to develop the entire block but then they ran into problems with the refuge around the back; City Mission, I think it was - and they redeveloped that site so they could never, ever get hold of it, yes.

RR: So, what about the business? You bought that – that was separate from the building, isn't it?

4.01 LS: Yes, I took the business over in '85, as I said, and then bought the building in about '92, I believe, yes.

RR: The whole of the building?

LS: No, just Jack Landis' share of it. So, David and I were tenants in common, yes.

RR: And where was Rob Landis then?

LS: Well, no, Robbie'd left the business altogether. He – I think he went to work for one of the golf companies and then he was working for a sail – you know, he's a great yachtsman – and then I think he at one stage was running the Mount Broughton Golf Club down at Moss Vale. I don't know where he is now; I don't know what Robbie's doing, yes.

RR: I know where he is, he's working for Syd Fisher.

LS: O.K, yes.

RR: One of the harbourside boats.

LS: Well, that's right, yes; he's a great yachtsman, yes.

RR: Now, what did you know about Jack Landis in the first place? Where did he come from, do you know?

LS: Well, Jack - in those early days they were two separate shops. There was Harry Landis' music shop and Jack had a pawnshop next door and over the years he found that every time he'd sort of pawn a set of golf clubs they were the first things he could sell easily. So, he just gradually got into the golf side of things and turned it into a second-hand golf shop and then eventually turned it into, you know, a full retail golf shop and then when Harry moved uptown - I think to Park Street, moved his music shop up - Jack knocked a hole in the wall and made it one big shop and just developed it from there.

5.30 **RR: I note from the records that it was a kind of an arcade in the first instance. There was four [street] numbers there, four shops**

originally, and they were gradually bought. So, now you say there was the music shop one side and the pawnshop the other?

LS: That's right.

RR: Which side was the pawnshop?

LS: Yes, no. The music shop was on the corner of Blackburn Lane and Elizabeth Street and the golf shop was the next one down, going towards Central.

RR: Next to Ma Elliott's, the other pawnshop?

LS: That's right. Yes, Ma Elliott's was further down. She was on the corner of Reservoir and she's then moved up, further up Elizabeth Street – she's up past Central.

RR: What about the sign, your knowledge of that?

6.14 LS: Well, I believe it was made by Consolidated Neon and who were bought out by Claude Neon's and it's somewhere in the early sixties. Jack actually designed it and had them build it and put on the roof, where it still stands today. I had to alter the sign because when I took the business over in '85 the owners wouldn't sell me the name, 'The Golf House', so consequently I wasn't allowed to use the sign. So, I was made to turn it off. I was originally going to call it, 'The New Golf House', but their lawyers told me that it was too close. My lawyers said I would probably win if I wanted to take it to court but then we decided that we'd just call it 'Sharpies' – not that I really wanted to do that but as it turned out it's just become one of those signs that have stayed there. So, Claude Neon's had to take 'The' out of the sign and put 'Sharpies' there and we could turn it back on again and it's been on ever since.

RR: Originally, do you know what year it was put up there?

LS: I believe somewhere around '61.

RR: Well, there's conflicting entries in the building permissions files. One is '61 and it refers to a "vertical sign" and then again in 1966 it refers to a "sky sign".

7.39 LS: Well, yes, I don't know. Like, I turned professional in '65 and I seem to remember it was there then. So, I can - - -

RR: So, maybe '61 in the first place?

LS: Yes, maybe it was, yes, yes.

RR: But it says in the records there's an application for a vertical sign and that's in '61.

LS: Yes, right.

RR: And then it refers to it in the – but it wasn't the same company either. It was another company. The first one in 1961 was "Neon Signs Australasia Limited, vertical sign".

LS: O.K, well maybe that was the case, maybe there was another sign there.

RR: And then 1966, [reading from records] "Consolidated Neon, stand support for sky sign".

LS: Oh, well, that might have been it.

RR: Well, I don't know. You might remember it more than I.

LS: No, I don't really, no.

RR: I mean, that's not clear, is it?

LS: No.

RR: And they could have well called the first one the vertical sign.

LS: Yes, that could have been one that was at the front of the building that went straight up and down, I can't really remember that. I know I put the awning sign there that's underneath the awning, that's still there now. That was in about '86 or '87 that one went up.

8.51 **RR:** And what about the building itself, the rest of it? I mean, originally it was supposed to have been four shops and three of them had upstairs, had two storeys and one of them didn't.

LS: Yes, that's right. They – in actual fact, back in the early days they were terrace houses, leading into Blackburn Lane - that was the original building. And that's why, I believe, it's heritage listed down the Blackburn Lane side because of the old window construction in the lane. And if you go into the building you can see where the actual terrace houses went in and out the back of the shop – the old courtyard is out the back, with the old toilet and everything there - and Jack Landis put a roof over that and put an outdoor driving range on that floor. So, in actual fact there was no roof for part of the building.

RR: Yes, I've got a record of that, actually. It's "roof deck", as long as 1921, "form new first floor to number 220".

LS: Yes, that's right. Yes, well, that's what they did because, you know, you can still see where the old laundry was and – matter of fact that's all gone now because of the development behind, when the excavation part of that building fell down. So, they've had to redo it so they didn't ever put the old laundry and toilet back again.

10.22 RR: **But these shops were actually number 216 to 222.**

LS: Yes.

RR: **So, how can that be that they had the entrances around the side in Blackburn Lane?**

LS: Yes, I don't know how that actually happened but I believe originally that they were, like, dwellings that went into Blackburn Lane. You know, that was the original use of them and you actually see where they were, where the old stairs'd go up, you know, into the second floor, the old wooden steps with the railing.

RR: **So, they must have been there prior to 1901 because 1901 is has them down as separate shops in Elizabeth Street.**

LS: Yes, that's probably right, yes.

RR: **And it looks to me to be very narrow for four shops, doesn't it? So, that's why I thought it might have been an arcade style?**

LS: Yes, no, not that I know of – was well before my time then but, you know, I only ever knew it – I didn't even know it with the music shop there – I only ever knew it when Jack had it as a golf shop.

RR: **It says "1977, deletion of arcade entrance and new display window and new entrance".**

LS: Yes, no, I can't remember that, I don't remember that.

RR: **1977, it was, yes.**

LS: Yes.

RR: **They applied for that and got it.**

LS: Right.

RR: **Before that, 1967, they wanted to pull the building down and build a new one. They wouldn't let them.**

11.43 LS: Right. Yes, I can't see where they've put a new entrance because it's still the old entrance - unless what they did was change the entrance to and put the shop window into where Harry Landis had the music

shop; there may been another entrance there, because both entrances to that building now are where Jack Landis' shop is. So, I'd say that's probably what they've done; they've closed the entrance to where Harry's shop was and put the shop window in.

RR: The entrance wasn't in the middle?

LS: No, no.

RR: No.

LS: No, the two entrances are definitely on Jack's side of the building.

RR: I wonder how they managed to get four shops then if they hadn't got a - - -

LS: I don't think they could have. They would have been very small shops.

RR: Yes.

LS: Mm.

RR: It belonged to a Dr Nash.

LS: No.

RR: And when the Landises bought it it was the Estate of Dr Nash.

LS: Oh, right, right.

RR: Yes, so I don't know.

LS: Yes.

RR: But the area to the north of that was all pulled down in 1901. That was known as the 'Wexford Scheme', when the formed Wentworth Avenue and I was trying to find out whether they were there before?

12.52 LS: Well, I know – the only thing I know is that Jack told me that there was an original plan to run Hay Street - continue Hay Street straight through and join up with Campbell Street, in which case the Golf House building and that would have gone and Jack had actually bought the diner which was two doors up to move the Golf Shop up there but the plans never, ever went through and I think Jack sold the diner a few years later – but that was the original plan.

RR: Now, when you had the Golf Shop, did you spend all the time there or just part of the time?

LS: Yes, no, I spent all my time there, yes.

RR: You had regular customers all the time?

LS: Oh, unbelievable. It was, you know, in those days it was the only place to go because we used to stock stuff, equipment that no one else did. We used to import it from overseas and everybody got to know that if you wanted something different that the Golf House was the place to go.

RR: So, what were some of the best items, best sellers?

LS: Oh, well, we used to sell, you know, the Callaways and the Pings and all of those, you know, right at the start, before they became the real fashionable golf clubs and – but the other thing was we kept a huge stock of second-hand golf equipment and it was a situation whereas if you lost a golf club, you're looking for something that, you know, that was rare or that you needed to fill in a set of golf clubs, we were the place to go because we had thousands and thousands of second-hand golf clubs.

14.23 **RR: People used to come in there and sell them?**

LS: Yes. Well, I used to travel the country, buying them. You know, I'd go up to Queensland and go to all of the golf shops and stuff and buy whatever they didn't want and, you know, we had people who'd ring us and bring them and whatever, yes.

RR: When you first got the shop, were golf trolleys in then?

LS: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, we sold a lot of that stuff, yes.

RR: What about buggies – do you ever sell them?

LS: Yes, we sold a lot of buggies. We sold everything that you could imagine to do with golf, yes. It was – we just carried the biggest inventory of anybody.

RR: What made you sell it in the end?

LS: Uh - well, I'd been there a long while and I wanted a bit of a change and the people that have got it now made me an offer that I thought was fair enough. You know, I'd been in the business for – you know, since basically 1967 and I just wanted a bit of a break and have a rest and that's what's happened.

RR: Have they changed it much?

LS: Yes, they have a little bit. They don't carry, you know, quite the equipment that we carried in those days. So, you know, that was unfortunate but that's the way it is and, you know, it's probably not as popular any more.

RR: Yes, I've been in there several times and there didn't seem to be many people in there but I suppose it might vary according to what - ?

LS: I believe it has slowed down a lot. You know, when we had it in the heyday, between 11 o'clock and 2.30 when people were having their lunch breaks we'd have twenty, thirty people in the shop all the time. And it was always like that: Saturday mornings, you know, we used to have five or six on the staff to cope with the amount of traffic we used to get through. I think parking has played a big part in it too. You know, there's not a great deal of parking around that area any more, which is making it very difficult.

16.10 **RR: There was in the first place?**

LS: There was a lot more, yes - when we took over in '85 there was a lot more parking there than what there is today.

RR: And you had employees there?

LS: Yes, I employed generally about eight to nine people and then we had casuals that'd come in, yes.

RR: So, you must have had a pretty good turnover.

LS: Yes, we did. We had a full time repairman that worked out the back that used to repair and refurbish the second-hand clubs and he was busy all the time – they no longer have that. I believe they've moved driving range from upstairs - which was the open air one – back down into the shop itself. So, that will have taken up a fair bit of space but, yes, it was a very big business, you know, right up until, you know, probably '98, '97, '98 when things started to slow down a bit.

RR: When you first bought the place, what sort of changes did you make then?

LS: We didn't make too many changes, just basically cosmetically. Jack, you know, always was known as a person that had all of the equipment that you could buy. We just changed the shoe room around a little bit and put a putting area in – so we'd carry four or five hundred putters at a time where, you know, people could just come and find every putter that was available and they could stand around and have a putt in their lunch hour or whatever, yes.

RR: Harry Landis, was he a golfer?

17.42 LS: I never knew Harry.

RR: What about Jack? Was he a golfer?

LS: No, he wasn't really a golfer, you know, I think he played a few games. He owned the Capital Golf Club down in Canberra and, you know, that was his main baby; he loved that down there and I think it's still in the family today.

RR: So, he must have got into it almost by accident then?

LS: He did. It was purely by accident. You know, he just discovered that there was a market for second-hand golf equipment back in those days and that's when he turned the pawnshop, and just gradually, you know, developed it into a golf shop.

RR: That's fascinating. Coming back to the sign; it was Claude Neon when you first went in, wasn't it?

LS: Yes, it was, yes, yes.

RR: And did you have any changes or anything like that, apart from the Sharpies?

LS: No, only the Sharpies; that was the only thing that was changed from the sign, yes. Yes, kept it exactly as it was.

RR: It didn't belong to you, did it?

18.40 LS: No, it belonged to Claude Neons and – but it was amazing how many times it was used: in rock videos, it was used in Bonds, Bonds made ads for it, there was quite a few other people use it. It was used in a commercial or in a thing about Sydney for the World Junior Soccer that went all over the world. It's an amazing sign, everybody knew it and I know that a lot of people used it in – I remember when – what was the name? There was a fish place up the road and their ads always said, "Just near the Golf House". So, because everybody knew, every taxi driver in Sydney knew if you said, "Oh, you know, I want to go down to such and such near Golf House", you know, and that was what they used to do.

RR: Did you get paid for other people using it?

LS: No, no. We never, ever charged anyone to use the sign; it was great publicity for us.

RR: So, it was really a leasing arrangement between you and Claude Neon?

LS: Yes, it was, yes, yes. We paid them a lease and a maintenance contract, so.

RR: So, are you aware of what's happening now?

19.55 LS: Well, yes, I've sort of been kept fairly informed with it and, you know, I couldn't understand. Firstly, I thought it was great advertising for Claude's anyway, to have the sign there. It's the flagship of all of their signs, their name's underneath it and even if it did cost them money to have it upgraded and repaired I thought it would have been good advertising for them - and the furore it's caused, you know, the fact that it could have been pulled down, with the radio and television and newspapers, you know, I think it would have been very bad publicity for Claude's to have pulled it down.

RR: In some places – in Melbourne for instance, the famous one down there, the 'Skipping Girl' - - -

LS: Exactly.

RR: They've moved that.

LS: Have they really?

RR: Yes.

LS: Well, I know that there was an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the two most famous signs in Australia and that was the 'Cowgirl' or the 'Skipping Girl', and the Golf [House] sign.

RR: Were you aware of if Jack Landis himself designed it or whether he copied it from somewhere else?

LS: No, I believe Jack designed it, yes. Yes, I believe Jack designed it.

RR: So, it isn't around any signs in America or anything like that?

21.06 LS: No, there's nothing like it anywhere; I've never seen a sign anything like it anywhere, it's a unique sign.

RR: Because I've been around the world too – I've never seen anything like it.

LS: No, no. No, I never actually spoke to Jack about the fact that he designed it but I do believe he did, yes.

RR: I'll be speaking to his two sons.

LS: Yes.

RR: Alan – I don't know whether I'll speak to David. I suppose I should as well, although he didn't know a lot about it, no.

LS: No, David wouldn't know a great – well, I doubt he'd know as much as Robbie or, yes.

RR: Alan knows a bit, of course, but he says Robbie, he put me onto Robbie, yes.

LS: Yes. Yes, Robbie worked there for many years, so he'd know.

RR: Now, what about people who maintained the sign? Are you aware that there was any contractors from Claude Neon because I'm trying to find somebody who has actually worked on the sign.

21.45 LS: I don't know – but all I know is that if we ever got a – if there was a letter out, like, the 'o' was out in 'House' or something like that, we'd get ten or fifteen phone calls the next day, letting us know that that was out - people had seen it from the train or, you know, "Do you know that this is wrong?", and "Do you know that that's wrong?" So, Claude's maintained it very well in that situation: we'd only have to ring them and they'd have workmen there but it was generally different people because they'd have to come and see us to get access to the roof.

22.13 **RR: All right. Is there anybody else you think I should interview?**

LS: No, I don't think there'd be anybody that would know any more than what David or Alan would know. You may speak to David but I don't think David – you know, I didn't see a great deal of David. He'd come in every now and again and, you know, if we had to do some maintenance on the building when we owned it jointly but that was the only time, you know – we had to put a new roof on it at one stage but that was about it, yes.

RR: Have you got any photographs or memorabilia?

LS: I may have - I'll have a look for you. I know we took some photographs for advertising purposes.

RR: Well, I'll pay to have them copied, if you like.

LS: I've actually got a – I think I've actually got a clip that they did for Galaxy TV – when Galaxy were going they did a whole thing on the Golf Shop. So, I can get a copy of that for you; it's a video that they played on television.

RR: Yes, that'll be good.

LS: It was Dean Jones and Ian Stanley did it.

RR: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr Lindsay Sharp.

23.32 LS: Pleasure.

Interview ends