



## COMMERCIAL ORAL HISTORIES OF CENTRAL SYDNEY

### ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

---

Interviewee: Marion Kilzer

Interviewer: Richard Raxworthy

Place: Katoomba

Date: 21 January 2001

---

### TRANSCRIPT

0.00    **RR:**    This is Commercial Oral Histories of Central Sydney Oral History. Richard Raxworthy interviewing on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2001, talking to Mrs Kilzer at her home in Katoomba. And I'll ask you first, could you please spell your full name for the tape?

**MK:**    The surname or - ?

**RR:**    The whole name, please?

**MK:**    Marion, M-A-R-I-O-N. Kilzer, K-I-L-Z-E-R.

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

**MK:**    I'm born in 1935.

**RR:**    I should have asked you – what about your maiden name? What was your maiden name?

MK: My maiden name was \_\_\_\_\_.

**RR: Yes, and your year of birth was again, sorry?**

MK: 1935.

**RR: And whereabouts?**

MK: In Germany, Hamburg.

**RR: And you grew up there?**

MK: I grew up there and - - -

**RR: Went to school?**

MK: I went to school there and I came to Australia when I was eighteen years old.

**RR: So, what year was that?**

MK: 1953.

**RR: You were there during the war, then, when Hamburg was badly bombed.**

1.13 MK: Yes. Yes, right through it.

**RR: That must have been a terrible experience.**

MK: It was. It was, it certainly was, yes.

**RR: And that decided you to leave?**

MK: No, no. The decision was actually my husband's. I knew him before - we were still girl and boyfriend and he decided to just - to venture out to Australia, just for experience and for something different - and he said to me, he said, "Oh, well, if that country is all right we'll go and get engaged and then marry". And actually here is one of the cards - I'll just turn my back for five minutes - and show you this.

Horst Kilzer? ..... ..

MK: See, we - - -

HK: Now you push them all together.

MK: Yes, yes. We have - so my husband came out first and in the meantime we did get engaged and somebody did this sketch here in

Germany that I was sort of engaged to a pencil; that's me hanging onto that, and there's the little dove carrying my engagement ring.

HK: .....

2.34 MK: And here is Horst with the black fellows and here he is in that pot. So, that tells the whole story of that. Yes, and the ring did come by mail.

HK: The never signed it .....

**RR: But you didn't come by mail?**

MK: No, I came on the Castel Verde for - we went - - -

**RR: On the what, sorry?**

MK: Castel Verde; it was an Italian ship.

HK: .....

**RR: Always.**

HK: .....

MK: So, yes, and so it was a big, big ship; there were one thousand, five hundred people on that ship.

**RR: Were they all from Germany or from the war countries?**

MK: Mostly from Germany. There were only about twenty five Greeks and that was all different ones but yes, on the whole it was from Germany.

**RR: So, you got married when you got into Australia?**

MK: M'mm.

**RR: What about your husband, how did he come out?**

3.30 MK: He came out through a railway contract.

HK: Railway contract.

MK: To build the railway.

**RR: Which railway?**

MK: The broad gauge line.

HK: For the Australian broad gauge line.

**RR: From where to where?**

MK: Mount Gambier to Adelaide, wasn't it?

**RR: Yes, through from Victoria to – yes, I understand. And when you came here, were you working when you arrived, after you arrived or not?**

MK: No. In my contract it stated I either had to marry within three months' time or in the meantime go as a domestic help for somebody until I was married. So, this is what happened; my first month I spent as a domestic help somewhere. So, I had no experience in that way and then my husband and I got married.

**RR: And when did you start – I mean, you were talking about when you arrived here you had a trade, did you?**

MK: Oh, well, yes. I did study in Germany. I had my apprenticeship and my diplomas; I made that in Germany before.

**RR: In what?**

4.37 MK: In furs.

**RR: Right.**

MK: Yes, it was all furs.

**RR: And how long was that apprenticeship?**

MK: Three years.

**RR: Right.**

MK: M'mm.

**RR: And is it the whole of the apprenticeship - - -**

MK: Yes.

**RR: - - - from the start of - - -**

MK: Start of, yes.

**RR: - - - even tanning the fur, tanning the skin or not?**

MK: No, no, no. Tanning, we didn't have to do but we had to know all about skins. Every individual skins and how many layer each skin did have. Like, the Persian lamb had about five layers of skins. What

type of needles to use for different furs and all types of cottons and you – we had to go through the whole lot. The – yes the making of it, the buying of it, the selling of it, we had to go through the whole lot, so.

**RR: What sort of skins, when you did your apprenticeship, what sort of skins did you use?**

MK: Well, we – I was very fortunate. I learned in Royal Furs only. So, I had never seen a rabbit skin or a lamb until I came to Australia. We only used the better skins, like mink and ocelot and Persian Lamb and all those expensive skins, yes.

**RR: What about chinchilla?**

6.00 MK: Chinchilla, yes. And even as far down as raccoon but nothing lower than a raccoon. No, no, as I said, we hadn't – foxes or rabbits I hadn't seen till I came to Australia.

**RR: Marmot?**

MK: Marmot, no, we didn't work with that. No, as I said it was all royal furs, so the most expensive; beaver and nutria and all those expensive furs.

**RR: I thought beaver was finished by then - - -**

MK: Oh, no, no, no.

**RR: - - - with the hats earlier on.**

MK: No, no, it – oh, it was very well worn in Germany, beaver and nutria, yes, it was one of the main furs to be sold

**RR: So, when you came here, how long was it before you got into the fur trade?**

MK: Well, it – of course, I had my children first and about thirteen years after I came into the fur business at Cornelius. We'd finally moved from the country into the – to Sydney and that was in 1970 and I started with Cornelius then and I worked there until the year 2000.

**RR: Did you know Max Cornelius before that?**

MK: No, but as we went to – well, I went off the street, I had no appointments, just asking for a job and as it so happened he knew my boss in Germany because were the biggest and the best.

**RR: Which was that?**

- 7.24 MK: So – that was the royal furs and the name was Berger and yes - - -
- HK: .....
- MK: - - - so Mr Cornelius knew him. And he said, “Oh, you learn there, so you can start tomorrow”. He didn’t have a vacancy but on hearing that he said, oh, that was good.
- RR: So, where did you start?**
- MK: So, I did then start a week later ..... ..
- RR: Where?**
- MK: In Castlereagh Street in Cornelius itself.
- HK: .....
- RR: In the factory or the shop?**
- MK: No, in the shop.
- HK: No, in the shop.
- RR: What was your job there in the shop?**
- MK: Well, I was a consultant and I was – well, I have done everything in the shop; actually, from – at very first, for a couple of months I did the finishing because I had learnt that also.
- RR: What does that entail?**
- MK: And that is a finishing off a garment is line it and practically put it together and then it didn’t take very long - I was tired of it, I got into the salon as a consultant.
- RR: Now, what does a consultant do?**
- 8.29 MK: Well, you have to know about fur and consult people on what they're buying and what – and because I was able to make a fur I could also suggest different styles and make them, take measurement and do the whole lot, so - - -
- RR: But you were actually selling as well?**
- MK: Yes, oh, yes.
- RR: So, a consultant doesn’t just - - -**

MK: No, that was all involved in the one thing but if clients wanted something special, well, I then could turn around and say, "Well, we haven't got this in stock but if put this and this together for you and – a flat fur with a fluffy fur as a trim and so on – so, yes, I was able to do all that.

**RR: What is a flat fur?**

MK: Flat fur could be a broadtail, a moray kid – what else is flat? – flat, is a calf is flat, pony is flat and kangaroo; we had used at one stage a lot of kangaroo skins and you could always trim it with a bit of fox or mink or whatever one chose.

**RR: And those are fluffy furs, are they?**

MK: The mink is more fluffy than a kangaroo is, yes, yes. Kangaroos is flat, as we say "flat", very flat.

**RR: What about astrakhan, as they used to call it?**

9.44 MK: Oh, yes, it's very curly.

**RR: The Persian lamb, that is?**

MK: Yes, that's astrakhan, Persian, very curly.

**RR: Is that a flat fur?**

MK: It is a curly fur. You can't say it's flat and you can't say it's fluffy; it's curly, it's all curls. So – but, yes, you could trim that too. If you wanted to have a mink trim on a Persian lamb, it would look very nice or a fox or an arctic fox or whatever, yes, match it up or have a contrast.

**RR: And what sort of furs were you using at the time?**

MK: Oh, at Cornelius? Oh, my God, we were using everything; minks, ermines, moray kids, Arabian kids, calf, pony, monkey – oh, it's a – tiger, ocelot, leopard, pershaneki, kolinsky - God, we had so many furs; to think of them all at once it's a bit hard but there's so many, such a big range. Nutria, beaver – what else? What else have I missed out on?

**RR: Had they started to ban the use of some species at that time?**

11.08 MK: Oh, well, yes, and not in the beginning, in the seventies. It was in the late seventies that they began to ban tigers and leopards and, yes, they were the main ones which were actually – yes, tiger, leopards, ocelots.

**RR: And what sort of clients did you get in there at that time?**

MK: Oh, what sort of clients? Oh, yes, it's unbelievable how many clients. We had, I think the whole of the parliament we had coming to Cornelius. Like, at that time we had made a coat for Mrs Whitlam [wife of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam] and - - -

**RR: Mrs?**

MK: Mrs Whitlam and - - -

**RR: What sort of coat was that?**

MK: I think it was an ermine coat. I was not involved with that particular person; I think Mrs Cornelius handled that herself and – but we made a special toile for Mrs Whitlam. And we had – oh, God, who did we have? Television stars like - - -

HK: Fairfax.

MK: - - - Bert Newton and we had Paul Hogan, we had Bette Davis.

**RR: Bette Davis?**

12.31 MK: Yes. We had Marlene Dietrich, would you believe.

HK: .....

MK: And Sophia Loren and – what was his name? We had, oh, God, Sir [Robert] Helpmann [Australian ballet dancer], yes.

**RR: Was this for themselves or in the men's shop?**

MK: For themselves. No, no, no, they came into the ladies – it was fur. Sir [Robert] Helpmann had a fur trim and he had also a mink coat or something - and Lady [Mary] Fairfax [newspaper proprietor], the Israeli – what was he again? Oh, it's in high office. Israeli - - -

**RR: Maybe an ambassador or consul?**

MK: Yes, yes, ambassador and - - -

**RR: Have you got any stories about any of these?**

MK: Uh - - -

**RR: Or about anybody as clients?**

MK: No, we had Shirley Bassey and I heard that she put on a bit of a tantrum. She had something made, I don't know – at that time we



were very, very busy: at that time we were a hundred and seventy five staff, we had five factories and - - -

**RR: Where were the factories?**

14.03 MK: They were on the corner of Castlereagh Street and almost adjoining to the St James Building. Actually, there's the - it's - - -

**RR: 72A?**

MK: It's 72, 72A and a bit further on. There was a corner and it was upstairs, yes.

**RR: But you said five factories. That's one, where were the others?**

MK: Five factories. And the other ones were in the Rigney Building that was opposite Cornelius; we could just go through a laneway, but it was actually off King Street. There was the Rigney Building and we had - - -

**RR: How do you spell that, Rigney Building?**

MK: R-I-G-N-E-Y.

**RR: Rigney, right, yes.**

MK: Rigney Building, yes.

HK: .....

**RR: Do you have any idea what number that is in King Street or is it actually in Castlereagh Street?**

MK: No, no, it's actually in King Street. You enter it from King Street. They still own that building.

**RR: That's the they call Cornelius Court, yes.**

MK: Cornelius Court. Actually, I don't know, it's sort of - it's together. I don't know whether they did sell the Rigney Building but it's adjoined to Cornelius Court.

**RR: So, that's two factories. Now, where were the other ones?**

15.25 MK: No, we had three on one floor on the corner of Castlereagh Street.

**RR: Right, three departments.**

MK: They were upstairs.

**RR: Yes.**

MK: And we had two in the Rigney.

**RR: And did they still have the one at Wembley House, down at Circular - - -**

MK: No, no, no, they had all come closer.

**RR: It had gone, yes.**

MK: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, I don't even know Wembley House; I wasn't there at that time.

**RR: Now, when you were there, can you remember any stories about the Cornelius family or about Mrs Cornelius – well, Dr Cornelius now, and Max Cornelius?**

MK: Mm.

**RR: Did you have anything to do with him very much?**

MK: Mm.

**RR: You did?**

MK: Yes.

**RR: What was he like?**

MK: Mrs Cornelius was mainly in the office and you not very often saw her but so - yes, she handled the business side of the business and, of course, Mr Cornelius was more involved in the fur side of the business and, yes, he was very – he was a very fatherly figure, Mr Cornelius; he always friendly, always a smile on his face and friendly to everybody. It didn't matter whether you're just working for him, whether you were a nobody or whatever, he had time for everybody. That was a lovely part of that. He was really – he always called us his family, the staff and - - -

HK: He loved .....

16.45 MK: And he did, of course, did a lot of sorting of the furs because he is the true furrier and he used to be downstairs and sorting out because you – to make a coat you need X amount of skins and they all have to match, so he loved sorting them.

**RR: Now, downstairs, that was the - - -**

MK: That was downstairs. Now, that's downstairs, it's downstairs at Cornelius, it's below street level. We had a downstairs.

**RR: The shop was also below street level?**

MK: Below the shop, yes, yes, yes.

**RR: But the shop is also below street level, isn't it?**

MK: Yes, it is, it is.

**RR: Or was, yes.**

MK: It's, it's a few steps down off the street, yes. But there's still one further down and we had a skin room. Did we have a skin room? You actually needed a map because the skins were stacked from the floor right up to the ceilings. And you had little gangways in it; you had to sort of squeeze through to find different furs. I mean, it was all very well organised but you needed a map, otherwise you would have gotten lost in all that heap of furs. And there was nothing he didn't have on fur: he even had hamster, you name it, and mole and things I can hardly remember, we had it all, and stacks and stacks of furs. As I said, you needed a map to go through the skin room. Not many people were allowed in there but because I had a trade knowledge of furs I was allowed in there but always felt very claustrophobic anyway, so.

18.25 **RR: There must have been a lot of money's worth of skins in there?**

MK: Oh, my God, yes.

HK: Oh, millions.

MK: Oh, yes, of course. Yes, there were millions. The stock – I think it took them – after they sold – I think it took them six weeks to empty the skin room alone, just the skin room, just the skins.

**RR: They didn't sell the skins in the skin room to the people who took over?**

MK: M'mm.

**RR: They did?**

MK: Yes, but they rearranged things and it took us a long while to sort it all out. And the toiles they had, toiles – they made their sort of patterns which are made out of calico, the actual coat, and there were - always the skins were sort of sketched into how many skins it needed to make this particular garment and it also served too, when we had a

client and we didn't have in stock what we wanted we might have gotten out one of those toiles.

**RR: How do you spell that, toile?**

MK: T-O-E-L-E-S.

**RR: Oh, toiles. Right, yes.**

MK: Toiles – well, they're called, because it's supposed to be French, they call it toiles. But, yes, and you could also use that as a pattern on a client and say, "Look, we can make you this coat. Just try this one on", or in order – like Mrs Whitlam, we made hers; just took her measurements and we made a toile before we actually cut into the skins.

**RR: Because she's a very tall lady, is that it?**

19.58 MK: She was very tall and, yes, she's bigger, too, than normal, so – but we did it, no, for other. We had Maria Findlay, she was a designer, she was very big at the time, Maria Findlay. And – oh God, we had so many people coming through there. Don Lane [television personality].

**RR: Don Lane?**

MK: Yes.

**RR: Was that for a fur?**

MK: Yes. And, oh God, how many did we have – I can't remember all the names. Don Lane and – what was this other name. He was Australian too. Oh God, what was his? – Taylor. Not Rod Taylor. What was his name? He was Australian. He came here and he was so drunk he didn't know what he wanted. He nearly fell into the salon. What was this Taylor? Rob Taylor, I think. Rod Taylor, Rod.

**RR: Anyway.**

MK: Anyway. So, yes, that was a bit of a story: he was going to buy a fur for his mother but his manager finished up buying it for him because he wasn't able to concentrate. And we had - - -

**RR: How many of you were actually working in the shop?**

21.21 MK: In the salon?

**RR: The salon, yes.**

MK: Well, with the casuals, the casuals included, twenty four.

**RR: And you?**

MK: Well, I was – that's myself included and we had people – and my mother came out from Germany; it was in '76, because my daughter got married - and we had people standing in a queue outside into the street, all the way up the stairs and outside. And we were then twenty four on the floor and we had a receptionist who held the people back and said, "Look, the minute we get – have somebody to guide you through we will let you through". So, one by one they were let through. Yes, and my mother, she said - I was supposed to have lunch at two o'clock and my mother was waiting there and she said, "I've never seen anything like that". No way did I get away at two o'clock - it might have been something like four o'clock. And it was unbelievable people. She said – my mother said, "I've been all over the world and I've never seen anything like this and here I come to Australia to a warm climate and people are queuing up for furs". Unbelievable. And we were totally exhausted, I know, in those seasons, oh, you were really, you were off your feet, yes - you just had to grab your lunch whenever you could get it.

22.49 **RR: And what about sheepskin, kangaroo skin? Did you - - -**

MK: Yes, yes, sheepskin, we did sheepskin, kangaroo.

**RR: All the cheaper ones as well?**

MK: Oh, yes, and rabbit.

**RR: Rabbit, yes.**

MK: Rabbit. We had all sorts; for every walk of life we had coats, garments.

**RR: And the rabbit – were any of those bred rabbits in Australia?**

MK: No, most of them were imported rabbits. We – no, we didn't have any locals – very few, if we did have.

**RR: So, they weren't wild rabbits?**

MK: No.

**RR: They were bred rabbits?**

MK: Most of them, yes, yes.

**RR: I know there's one rabbit, bred rabbit, called a chinchilla rabbit.**

MK: Yes.

**RR: Did they ever use them?**

MK: It beautiful. Yes, oh, yes. You can hardly – of course, chinchilla rabbit, I got one. I used to – I bought it twice because I've got so many furs that I didn't get around to wearing it. But, yes, it's - - -

**RR: What about the chinchilla itself?**

MK: Very expensive.

**RR: Yes. Dr Cornelius spoke of that being a fool of a fur.**

MK: A fool of a fur? Not the chinchilla - - -

**RR: Yes, she said it was too expensive - - -**

MK: It was.

**RR: - - - and didn't wear well.**

MK: No, it didn't; it's very delicate. But then - - -

**RR: That's the most expensive fur there is.**

24.08 MK: That and sable. Sable is very expensive. The last coat we had, a sable in Cornelius, it was at that time the full price was seventy five thousand [AUD]. Big price, wasn't it? Yes.

**RR: What about – working up towards the time when the business was taken over, was sold?**

MK: Oh, the Koskys took it first. That was after Cornelius itself and they had a lot of furs on consignment from the Corneliuses because there was a lot of stock involved at that time and - - -

**RR: Was it very different?**

MK: Yes. Yes, oh God, yes. Yes, oh, yes. It wasn't the same any more, no, because they had their own factories in Melbourne and they weren't as exclusive as we were, as Cornelius was. So, of course, business wasn't quite the same any more after that.

**RR: And not long after it was sold Mr Cornelius died.**

MK: That's right. He died in '76.

**RR: Sure?**

MK: No, in '78.

**RR: That's right, yes.**

MK: Because I was in Germany and he was in Germany. He was in Frankfurt and I was in Hamburg but I didn't know that he was in Frankfurt, I had no idea. I only found out after I arrived back in Australia that he had died there, in Frankfurt.

**RR: He died in Frankfurt. I didn't know that, no.**

25.50 MK: Yes, in the bathtub, yes. So, yes, that was in '78.

**RR: Was he over there to go to the fair, the Frankfurt Fair?**

MK: Yes, yes, I think he was exporting at that time some fox skins. Yes, he was there on business. He hated selling Cornelius because it was his baby; he lived for furs – he was a real furrier, yes, he loved it. And – but I suppose it was time to retire and I think Stella wanted to retire – Mrs Cornelius, I should say. And so fast, yes, he died soon after; must have had a massive heart attack.

**RR: And under the Koskys were all the factories closed down in Sydney, the back area?**

MK: Quite a few; we only had about two left.

**RR: Did they take over the building next door or just the lease on the Trust Building?**

MK: Just, yes, just the lease, yes. Yes, yes.

**RR: So, they only had the salon?**

MK: Yes.

**RR: And the store down below, did they keep that?**

27.11 MK: The – yes, downstairs, yes, because we still had people working there. Like, we still had a skin room, sort of a skin room – not like Mr Cornelius had – but a skin room downstairs and we had somebody managing that and keeping record of the skins and we had – not an accountant there - we had an office worker there. And that was just downstairs and we had downstairs the office staff, the real office staff, like the girls run on the telephone service and about four or five other.

**RR: And that's in what had been the skin room?**

MK: Yes. That used to be Max Cornelius' skin room; they made that into an office and – one part, and the other part was skin room with just one office worker there right in the skin room, to check the skins out.

**RR: Were you aware of the advertising policies, where they used to advertise during the time of the Corneliuses and then later?**

MK: Well, we used to have – I think we used to be in Vogue; that was in the Cornelius time, not that I know a lot of what they did. They did, in the theatres – I know they did because we got a lot of - - -

**RR: Who, the Corneliuses?**

MK: - - - yes – we got a lot of – we loaned out a lot of furs. But she did have something for the Opera House, something to do with that, I vaguely remember and - - -

29.05 **RR: And did that change with the Koskys?**

MK: Mm.

**RR: It did. What did they advertise in? Nothing?**

MK: Not much at all, no. No, the - - -

**RR: What about the window, window dressing?**

MK: No, we had a professional doing that and - - -

**RR: During the Cornelius?**

MK: - - - Cornelius and - - -

**RR: And did that carry on?**

MK: Yes, it did, that was carried on, yes.

**RR: Because I remember looking down into the salon there and they had a dressed window there, very elegant.**

MK: We had – yes, we had a lot of windows there, actually. One, two, three, four, five – five windows, a bit platform .....

**RR: But you could still see down into the salon?**

MK: Yes, yes. From the street on you'd sort of look down, yes.

**RR: So that didn't change?**

MK: No. No, they couldn't, because it's a Trust Building so they couldn't make anything on the structure itself. They had to – always had to stay like that.



**RR: I notice now that there's blinds down on all those windows. The name 'Cornelius' is still over the door.**

MK: Yes, well. No, they are going to open up a jewellery – an art gallery and a gallery, jewellery gallery, yes and - - -

**RR: Now, what about the Koskys? They didn't last that long - they in turn were taken over as well, were they?**

30.28 MK: Yes, they were then taken over by Kemplers.

**RR: And was the name of the place still Cornelius while Kempler - - -**

MK: Oh, yes. No, it stayed Cornelius because Cornelius had the name.

**RR: And Kempler in Melbourne, was that the name there?**

MK: Yes, yes, they've got a factory there and they did – they used to have a shop in – they used to have Fietel [?], the Kemplers itself, that had nothing to do with Cornelius. Fietel and there was another funny name – oh God, I'm doing things. Fietel and what was it? – Jackson, that was their little shop.

**RR: Jackson was another shop, was it?**

MK: Mm.

**RR: Yes. Were they both fur shops?**

MK: Yes. Yes, and they had a fur – a little section at Myers in Melbourne.

**RR: And did Kemplers also have a factory in Sydney?**

MK: No, only what we had, ours – which was left over from us, from the original Cornelius.

**RR: Roughly how many people were working there then?**

31.37 MK: Ah, there were about – not many. James, Mike – about six.

**RR: And before that how many were working there? Well, you've said a hundred and something?**

MK: A hundred and seventy five – and yes, and then we were only – we were down to – see, things changed so quickly. A lot of people – they closed factories, they were all laid off and then, yes, we had only the six downstairs. And how many on sales staff?

HK: ..... ..

MK: It must have been about nine - that's with casuals.

**RR: And from over twenty before?**

MK: Mm.

32.58 **RR: Yes, so there was a big reduction. Now, how much do you think was the policies of the new company and how much was the general feeling against fur? And when did that feeling against fur start?**

MK: It started in '94.

**RR: As late as that?**

MK: Yes. I was managing then for Cornelius. Yes, I've been sort of doing all sorts of things at Cornelius and I was - - -

**RR: When did you become manager?**

MK: - - - I was managing the Levy store, which we had bought earlier on and - - -

**RR: Where was that?**

MK: That was in - - -

HK: Centrepont.

MK: Yes, Centrepont.

**RR: And that was part of Cornelius?**

MK: Cornelius, yes. Yes, yes – well, that - - -

**RR: But it was called Levy's, yes?**

MK: Yes and Kemplers bought it. And we were – there was four sales staff and myself; so that's five in that shop - it wasn't a big shop.

**RR: That was during the Cornelius years, still, was it?**

34.00 MK: No. That was in the Kempler.

**RR: No, in the Kemplers – all right, yes.**

MK: This was later – it was '94 – or did we close '94. I was there already '91 and the fur business must have started '92 or '93, not '94.

**RR: What, started to decline?**

MK: Yes, when we had the demonstrations and the activists against furs.

**RR: Was that frightening?**

HK: Yes.

MK: Well, it didn't frighten us because we didn't do anything: we didn't fight back, we just let them march past the shop and they said their thing, they call us murderers and whatnot and we just didn't take any notice of them. In the end, they left anyway. So, no, it didn't disturb us. Well, one time they wanted to come right into Cornelius – it was while I still was over there - and we just made a human chain near the stairs and they couldn't go any further. So, anyway, so but no, it didn't give us a – of course people didn't stop wearing furs – it declined and business wasn't the same any more after that.

35.16 We then concentrated on leather garments, cashmere and wool garments, accessories as handbags from crocodile to emu, ostrich; very expensive bags - and also cheaper ones - but, yes, there was one carrier case which was priced at five thousand dollars and that was the ostrich.

**RR: And those sort of carrier cases, were they competing with Vuitton on the opposite side of the road?**

MK: Well, no.

HK: .....

MK: Well, I didn't really – I never went into Louis Vuitton's. And, of course, this wasn't leather; it was manmade materials what they did sell, where we had the genuine, the crocodile and the snake and, you name it, we did have it. So, then we had other things like scarves and belts and all sorts of things and raincoats, for mens and for ladies and we then, yes, had to do that in order to keep on going, to exist.

**RR: So, salons – under the Cornelius Furs, when Mr Cornelius, Mrs Cornelius as she was then, how many salons did they have – just the one?**

36.50 MK: Mm.

**RR: And then under Kosky, how many salons?**

MK: Only one.

**RR: Only the one. But under Kempler -?**

MK: Only the one.

**RR: What about Levy?**

MK: Oh, that was a – yes, well, yes, they bought that later on, that's right.

**RR: So there was two then?**

MK: Two, yes.

**RR: But they didn't keep that going long or -?**

MK: No, they – we - they had to wait – Centrepont had to wait until our lease ran out because they made this big – what is it called? – what is it called again? – like they have on the airport – duty free shop. So, about nine businesses had to vacate for them to take over. So, we didn't move because we had no reasons to move, so they waited till our lease was up because we had the front shop - we had the best position there was - and with us being out they couldn't move, so they had to wait till our lease expired and then they didn't renew it and we had to leave.

37.51 **RR: Have you any idea when the lease expired at Levy's?**

MK: In '94. It was in August or was it September.

**RR: Well, that's near enough.**

MK: Yes, in '94.

**RR: And what about when they first took that up over there?**

MK: Oh, they - - -

**RR: Did they start it or was it already there?**

MK: Levy's – they had bought it – Levy sold it, Mr Levy – and when was that? It was – I was there '94. Must have been in the eighties. I really don't exactly know the date.

**RR: But he started it as a fur business, did he?**

MK: Levy was a fur business - it was sold as a fur business; we bought all their furs.

**RR: But Mr Cornelius was already dead then?**

MK: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, the Kempler bought it, the Kemplers. And they also had one little shop that was only – wasn't there for long and that was in the Hilton, in the Hilton itself – really tiny shop. There used to

be a jeweller in there - and then, you know, it was only one person running it because it was minute.

39.00 **RR: But that was under the Kempler, was it?**

MK: That was under the Kemplers too.

**RR: Now, what about the men's shop, as they used to call it, the leather side of it?**

MK: Oh, that was when the Cornelius had it, the original Cornelius. They had that as an extra for men's – leather shop – and partly for - - -

**RR: Was that next door?**

MK: Yes, it's adjoining. We just put a wall across it and mirrors on it but it was actually one.

**RR: It was part of the Trust Building, was it?**

MK: It had, yes, it had two entrances; it was bought as such - and then they decided one day to just make it a men's shop because it was separate, so obviously they could go - from the back of the men's shop you could still walk into our salon; it was left open but it was sort of sectioned.

**RR: Was that open when you first came to work for Cornelius?**

MK: No.

**RR: So, roughly when did they - - -**

MK: No, like, a couple of years I must have been there – '72, '73. Oh, Bill was there – Bill Hosford is another one to – maybe you'd like to - - -

**RR: Bill -?**

MK: Bill Hosford.

**RR: How do you spell the name?**

MK: H-O-S – Ford, F-O-R-D. Hosford.

**RR: Did he run the men's shop, did he?**

40.23 MK: He did run it for years but he left Germany – Germany – Cornelius but he probably hasn't got much to say about them. He didn't – \_\_\_\_\_ so – but he was there in the men's shop – he was there for the best of fifteen years or so.

**RR: After the Koskys and the - - -**

MK: He was there – no, he was still there when Cornelius was. How - - -

**RR: Yes, but you said it was on '70 - - -**

MK: '72. Bill came a bit later, I think, but the Corneliuses were still there. Yes.

**RR: Did you ever work in the men's shop, in the leather shop?**

MK: No.

**RR: No. Did you sell leather goods, the leather coats and such like, in the women's side?**

MK: Yes, a small amount, yes. In the Cornelius time only a small amount; the main part was fur but then later on it changed; we had more of the other than fur.

**RR: And what about at Levy's? That was all -?**

MK: Well, when I got there it was all fur but then the demonstrations started and we had to quickly change – then we changed into leather and suede - suede and sheepskins, this sort of thing.

**RR: And what about at the Hilton? Were you ever working there?**

41.53 MK: No.

**RR: Was that fur or -?**

MK: It was a mixture; fur and leather and sheepskin.

**RR: Was that when the Kemplers were there or was that during -?**

MK: Kemplers. The Kemplers were there. We only had that for a couple of years; it wasn't very long. She must have got it in '90 – they must have started that Hilton shop in '93 (excuses herself for a minute to get hankie). That must have been in '93 and it was closed in – when was it closed? '93/'4, it was still open in '95 – maybe they close it in '96, something like that.

**RR: And were you aware of the office side of things? When did they computerise or did they ever computerise?**

43.06 MK: Oh, yes, they did.

**RR: During the Cornelius time? No?**

MK: No.

**RR: What about the stock – was that never computerised?**

MK: No.

**RR: So, all this fur room - - -**

MK: We had our map.

**RR: You had the map but how'd they keep the stock?**

MK: They were so organised, the Cornelius's were – it's same with the toile in the Rigney Building. They had toiles and patterns which they got from Europe, from France, from, oh, wherever they went to; Russia and all this, and there were always maps that you knew exactly where to go and where to find what – oh, we had, well, many people working in the office; yes, they kept track of it. They was a whole, there was - as I said the one man in the skin room - in the Cornelius time there were three there, they had to have three. They had to have two in lay-buy, yes, full time, because there were so many lay-buys coming in every day that they needed two full time workers and three for the skins – and they knew exactly and they had a ledger. And if you wanted a skin and you had for instance – I have a skin number with fifty four or whatever, and said, "Look, this is a black mink, number is fifty four", that means the whole bundle is marked with a fifty four. Then he just went through the ledger and said, "Yes, we got so many skins of that left. Yes, you can have them", or "I have six of them". Oh, the bookwork, it was all done manual but it was on track, it was good.

44.38 **RR: So, when the Koskys and the Kemplers then took over, how did that go with -?**

MK: Well, it didn't go so good because they sacked a lot of people and, yes, and it wasn't the same any more, same stocktake or anything like that \_\_\_\_\_  
And so - - -

**RR: So, how were your relations with the people that owned the business?**

MK: The last people, Kemplers?

**RR: Yes.**

MK: Fine.

**RR: That's all right, yes.**

MK: Oh, yes.

**RR: And were you by that time in charge of the salon, were you?**

MK: Yes.

**RR: So, when did you actually take - - -**

MK: I had the salon and I had at one stage – I had so many things there – at one stage I was in remodels, restyling, because they didn't have any professional ... one was in hospital and one left – and I had to do that for a while and do all the fittings and the thingies and the marketing of the skins and how many went into this coat, how many went into that and the pricing of it. So, I actually, I have done – as I said, I've done everything in Cornelius bar computer; that's the only thing I haven't done but everything else.

46.03 **RR: There must be quite a lot to restyling as well. That's restyling of other people's fur coats?**

MK: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But, see, this is where you learnt the business then and it's expected of you and, "Oh well, you know, Marion can do it", and so I had to do it and did do it.

**RR: What about some fur companies used to keep in cold store the people's coats during the summer?**

MK: Yes, we did.

**RR: You did. Where was that, where was the - - -**

MK: That was downstairs.

**RR: And that was refrigerated, air conditioned, was it?**

MK: Air conditioned, yes, all of it.

**RR: Air conditioned, yes.**

MK: Oh, God, yes. Yes, it had to be. Oh, yes, yes, it was nice and cold there too.

**RR: So, roughly when did people bring their coats in for store?**

MK: Oh, the beginning of summer because fur doesn't like humidity – so, in the summer months especially. And then they'd get it out just before winter, in late May or early June they get it out – and it's been cleaned: before it does into storage, of course, it has to be cleaned, treated and revitalised and then it went into storage.



**RR: How often did you remodel coats? You know, did you remodel some of them several times or -?**

47.21 MK: Oh, yes. Yes, depending on the fur. Mink is the hardest wearing fur and you could remodel it two or three times, yes, because it's very strong, so yes.

**RR: And do some of them stretch?**

MK: Oh, yes, they have to. Once you pull it apart and you put a different pattern onto it, yes, the skins will be stretched. They will be stressed and stretched and the rest of it.

**RR: It's another world.**

MK: Yes, that's – but that's for the furrier, that wasn't for me. They did the actually nailing, they nail the skins out to stretch them and nail them down flat.

**RR: And then what's the next stage?**

MK: Oh, the machinists; they have the machinists. It's got to be put together by a machinist, skins.

**RR: with a pattern at that time, the toile?**

MK: And the toile? Not always. Sometimes they had just patterns: if they made garments for stock they were just the paper patterns and they didn't need the toile - but if you wanted something special for a good client you put the toile on or you made one for that client and say, "Look, we'll make it exactly to your measurements and you try it on. If you like it, we'll make into the skins, into whichever you choose". Very interesting; it's never boring.

**RR: What about the packaging of the furs when they went out? Was there special packaging?**

48.51 MK: Not, not really. Just - we had Cornelius bags and we had tissue paper, so we just put the coat into tissue paper and it went into a bag.

**RR: Were they plastic bags? Yes?**

MK: Yes. It used to be boxes - in the Cornelius times there were boxes; Cornelius cardboard boxes but in very nice grey and black - and yes, and later on it went to plastic bags.

**RR: They didn't have ribbons or anything like that on them?**

MK: No.

**RR: And what about change of trade methods? Did that happen over the years or is it essentially the same methods all over?**

MK: Well, the basic is always the same; there's not much changed.

**RR: So, only the sewing machines changed, more modern machines?**

MK: No.

**RR: No?**

MK: No, they're still the old machines. They haven't – no, they're still, still there and they're fantastic and - - -

**RR: Were they Quickstop motors where they could stop at the top or stop at the bottom?**

MK: Yes, you could stop, yes, yes.

**RR: That is an Australian - - -**

MK: You started that one – there was the switch was on the side and you just push it with your knee, sort of, and it started again. And opening it up to get your fur in, because the fur is so, like that, it's not a flat machine.

**RR: And that's the bit with the dart, yes.**

50.07: MK: So, it's like an overlocker. It's like - - -

**RR: And then when you want to turn a corner you put it down, don't you, keep it down as you turn it? No?**

MK: Well it – no, you went to one – finish one end and then you turn it into the next, so to make it a square or make it a corner or what - - -

**RR: But when you turn it, then you have the - - -**

MK: You open up; you have to open up the machine and take it out and then push the other bit under.

**RR: I was trying to get it clear because there's a motor called the Quickstop motor which you could stop in the top or the bottom at any given time, as I said. I don't know whether they had them or not.**

MK: Well, I have – no.

**RR:** No, right. So, it's an advantage because when you stop it at the bottom then you can then you can turn it, whereas you've got the needle still in, whereas when you want to take it out then you've have it the top, which is handy, you know.

**MK:** Well, I think that didn't – that wouldn't have made all that much difference, really, ..... because you stop it – whether you stop it from the top or the bottom you still have to take the fur out and turn it. You can't just do a corner, like this, zip it, and you still have to start from one end to the next.

**RR:** What about doing curves?

51.24 **MK:** Curves, yes, you can do them but then the machine is still guided, on the machine itself, bit by bit – it's a jerky sort of a – you know, little jerks like this bit and then push that bit. And, yes, well, the fur business it's really have to – there's many people involved in making a fur garment.

**RR:** Yes. Did the Koskys sell out was it a takeover, do you know?

**MK:** Well, they sold it.

**RR:** Right.

**MK:** I think – \_\_\_\_\_ sold it.

**RR:** And what about in the end, when the Kemplers had the Cornelius business?

**MK:** Well, there was nobody, really, to take over. There's no – all the professionals, they're my age or older and the fur game was just dying out. There's no one - unless somebody would have come from overseas because overseas it's still - they are strong.

**RR:** What about the leather side of it? That could continue?

**MK:** No, we weren't manufacturing the leather. We bought the leather and we had our .....

**RR:** So, is the business completely closed down now?

**MK:** Completely.

**RR:** It's not gone into leather or anything else or sold or -?

**MK:** No, no. No, we couldn't find a buyer and we couldn't find anybody in the fur business - and they would have made money now because we were the only one left, actually, as fur people.

**RR: So, you've retired now?**

53.00 MK: Yes. Well, I had to; they closed. Otherwise, I would have been still there.

**RR: You could start up in the mountains here.**

MK: Yes.

**RR: It's colder up here.**

MK: I tell you what, here in the mountains there's no money. I wouldn't dare start it; I'd go probably broke before I start. No, I wouldn't do it.

**RR: There's one question I'd like to ask about some of the furs. I know that the chinchillas are originally from South America but were any of the other – I mean, did they bring in llama skins, for instance?**

MK: No.

**RR: No, all right. Vicuna?**

MK: No.

**RR: No, only as a cloth now, they're everywhere.**

MK: Yes. No, we – no, we haven't. Though we had lots of furs – oh, my God, did we have furs.

**RR: Llama skins are quite nice, you know. They pull the hair out and then the under fur is - - -**

MK: Yes.

**RR: Yes. I had a llama skin coat myself.**

MK: Have you?

**RR: I did. No, my son got it.**

MK: Yes.

**RR: But they've used the fur inside.**

MK: Oh, yes, would be warm.

**RR: Yes.**

MK: Oh, yes.

**RR:** All right. Well, I've just about – can you think of any other questions that I should ask you that we haven't talked about, aspects of the business that you were involved with, know about?

**MK:** Yes. No, I think we covered everything. We had the restyling department, we had the cleaning, restyling, remodeling of old goods.

54.29 **RR:** Well, in that case - - -

**Interview ends**