CITY OF SYDNEY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Rodney Jacobs

INTERVIEWER: Richard Raxworthy

DATE: 23/01/01

PLACE: Randwick

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **RR:** **This is Commercial Oral Histories of Central Sydney; Richard Raxworthy interviewing Mr Rodney Jacobs at his home at Randwick on the 23rd of January, 2001. I'll ask you first, Mr Jacobs, could you spell your full name for the tape recorder?**

RJ: Rodney, R-O-D-N-E-Y. Jacobs, J-A-C-O-B-S.

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

RJ: 1925.

RR: **And whereabouts?**

RJ: Bondi.

RR: **Did you grow up there?**

RJ: Yes, the famous Bondi. Yes, I grew up there, yes.

RR: **Went to school there?**

RJ: Yes, and then onto Sydney Boys High School.

RE: And when you left Sydney Boys High School, what did you do then?

RJ: I worked in a shop called Capital Mercery in Pitt Street and one of the shops at 420 Pitt Street was the one that Andy Ellis later bought. That was – he bought that in 1954.

RR: And you first met him there, did you?

1.14 RJ Yes, I was in the shop, managing it, and he came in and he wasn't very impressed with the shop; he said the location wasn't good. I said, "Well, it keeps three families, it can't be too bad", and I saw him – in those days he had a workroom above Adelstein's in Oxford Street. And he said, "It's not a good address". I said, "Well, it's better than the address you've got. You've got to walk up ninety nine steps here and you've got a factory. This is a shop, street level. I think you should buy it". He said, "Well, I'll buy it on one condition; that you manage it for me". I said, "Fair enough", and we shook hands and that was it.

RR: Who owned it before he bought it?

RJ: Some union owned the property and Capital Mercery – my namesake, Jacobs, they rented the shop on lease.

RR: Do you know when they started the shop?

RJ: Well, they were still down there in the Depression years and as I say, even in the Depression years – admittedly the Capitol Theatre was the theatre, that was the end of the city - but it still kept three families, even in the Depression years. So, it's always been a good shop, put it that way.

RR: But what was the name of the shop before Andy Ellis bought it?

2.37 RJ: Capital Mercery.

RR: Capital Mercery, right.

RJ: ……. ……

RR: You don't know what union owned the building?

RJ: Some workers' union – which one, I'm not sure.

RR: Did they own the whole block, the pub as well?

RJ: Yes, they did own the whole block, yes.

RR: And do you know anything about the building before that?

RJ: Not really. They had it from day one, to my knowledge. They – it's a pretty old building; it'd be about ninety, a hundred years old. It's since been sold; the chap that owns the restaurant on the corner or the milk bar, he and the hairdresser bought it between them.

RR: It's up for redevelopment at the present moment but they've got heritage problems.

RJ: Well, yes, and plus the fact they want too much money – the old story.

RR: And so when you were working there before, how did it change when Andy Ellis took over?

RJ: Oh, a totally different concept. We were catering for Mr Average – Andy was catering for the young people, the bodgie era. And in those days there were only Ron Bennett of Newtown and Scottie's Tailoring near Mark Foy's selling the type of merchandise the young people wanted - the big stores wouldn't have a bar of it. So, I had to learn all over again to put in the type of merchandise that they wanted - and with a bit of luck we were successful.

RR: The previous outfit, Capital, did they have a workroom upstairs?

4.10 RJ: No, they had a storeroom upstairs. That became Andy Ellis' workroom; he made the suits on the premises.

RR: And did he do the cutting – what did he do, actually?

RJ: Andy did a lot of cutting but of course we were selling that many suits he couldn't do it all; he had two other cutters.

RR: Do you know if he was a qualified tailor?

RJ: Oh, yes. Andy?

RR: Mm.

RJ: Oh, yes, very much so. A lot of people would refer to him as a master tailor. There was very little Andy couldn't do. To see him do a hand buttonhole was a work in itself; it would take an hour to do one buttonhole.

RR: On bodgie suits?

RJ: On any suit. A buttonhole is a work of art and I would say that nine out of ten suits now fact - perhaps a higher average than nine out of ten - they're all machine done and there's a big difference in a machine buttonhole and a hand finished buttonhole, I can assure you.

RR: His suits, were they machine made?

RJ: Oh, yes, at that price. I think we sold them for twenty four pounds, ten. You most certainly couldn't get hand work.

RR: Did he get many overseas sailors coming in? I mean, about that time the teddy boy suit was going in England.

5.36 RJ: Well, Andy actually catered for that. As I said, there were three shops in which you could buy this type of merchandise and the big stores wouldn't be in it. One of the directors of Amco, introducing the jeans for the first time in Australia, denim, he showed the trousers to me - they weren't – they were trousers, denim trousers and not so much as jeans which they did later – and he said, "What do you think?", and I said, "I'll have a hundred pairs". He collapsed. When I picked him up, I said, "Why did you have a heart attack". Well, he said, "David Jones bought two pairs from me – one in the window and one inside in case the customer had any interest in them". So, we bought a hundred and we kept buying a hundred.

RR: Now, how did you advertise, how did they know that Andy Ellis' were there?

RJ: Well, we did a lot of things. We made the suits for the Tommy Tycho's Orchestra on Channel Seven - that was the 'Sydney Tonight Show', Monday to Friday, so every night you saw suits made by Andy Ellis, 420 Pitt Street – and, well, I think Andy had such a following that the word got 'round.

RR: What about Brian Henderson?

7.02 RJ: Yes, I think Brian Henderson may have come to the shop – they all came in at some stage.

RR: I've got a picture there with Brian Henderson in an outlandish jacket - - -

RJ: Oh, yes, yes.

RR: - - - with Digger Revell next to him.

RJ: Yes. Don't let him hear you say it was an outlandish jacket; he thought it was fantastic.

RR: I think he'd regard it as an outlandish jacket now.

RJ: Yes, oh, yes, now. But you've got to remember that a lot of them that came to Andy in those days, they can now afford to go to Double Bay tailors and a lot of them perhaps wouldn't like to even suggest that

they had to go to a bodgie tailor – it was an era and of today it's a lost era.

RR: But Slim Dusty still goes there.

RJ: Well, very few people would make the type of cladding that Slim wants. Mainly, it's stressed material, which is damned hard to make; a lot of lurex and things like that – and Andy, of course, excelled in that and, oh, yes, he made up everything for Slim until his death.

RR: I'm trying to contact him but of course he's at Tamworth at the present moment. But Ross gave me a little piece of gold material that came from Col Joye's jacket.

8.23 RJ: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Yes, well, Col wore a lot of – they were beautiful on stage but that's all they were meant to do; they were meant to have a stage appearance, a lot of glitter.

RR: I've been trying to locate him. I think he lives somewhere in Woolwich.

RJ: Yes. Well, he fell from a tree a few years ago and he's never actually recovered a hundred per cent – but a lovely person, Col Joye, lovely, lovely person.

RR: What about some of the others that - - -

RJ: Well, I remember – I think Des Renford used to go there a lot, the swimmer, Des Renford. He was a hard man to make for; he has this enormous chest and then no stomach, no waist. Johnny O'Keefe, he was just about a permanent visitor.

RR: Was Johnny O'Keefe one of the first? Because Ross was saying to me that he thought that he might have been because his father had a furniture shop up the road.

RJ: Further up the road, yes. Well, it's hard to say about who was the first and who wasn't but Johnny O'Keefe was a very consistent customer – put it that way.

RR: When did Andy buy the shop there?

RJ: He took over the shop in 1954.

RR: And when did he start doing the riding coats and whose idea was that?

9.53 RJ: That was Andy's idea because the bodgie era had gone. I had left – don't get me wrong when I say that - but, I mean, I did the windows and the buying of the mercery and I did all the PR work and it was no

good flogging a horse that had won its race - and Andy, being the designer he was, decided to go in for dressage and he won every award about the place – became a magnificent business, really.

RR: Ross never told me anything about that. Oh, I see, dressage, for riding dressage.

RJ: Yes, riding wear, yes. And not only for women but for children too and - - -

RR: What was the difference in a riding jacket from an ordinary jacket? Were there the slanting pockets and the round points?

RJ: Well, no. The big difference was that enormous flare of the jacket sitting over the saddle and Andy had that flare. It was – when you saw the average riding coat and you saw an Andy Ellis riding coat there was no comparison: he actually cornered the market, although it is a limited market as you'd be no doubt aware.

RR: And he was advertising in the riding magazines, was he?

11.16 RJ: Oh, yes, yes. Well, Andy did all that, yes.

RR: Bud do you know what he was advertising in? I heard *Hoof and Horn* but what about anything else?

RJ: Well, I think he selected the one that had the most circulation. I did an ad for him - and I have it in my hand - and unfortunately he missed the magazine, the cut-off date, and he said to me, “It was a wizard of an ad” - but it’s one of those things. That was my last ad for him – it missed out.

RR: What about some of the promotions that you did with Andy Ellis?

RJ: Well, Andy had tremendous ideas. Most of those promotions I did were his, his idea, but of course Andy always said I had the gift of the gab, so I was the one that had to go out and do it. The biggest promotion, I think, would have been - the agreement we had was Metro Goldwyn Mayer. I was just lucky that I happened to see them when they were doing the – to film ‘Beau Brummel’, and they suggested that they – could we enter a competition to see who was Australia’s best dressed Beau Brummel, which we did, and we had a big evening at the Hotel Australia and that was highly successful.

12.41 Then we had all our windows, our window displays tied in with huge photographs of MGM stars and films. And then, of course, up came ‘Guys and Dolls’ and again they wanted to find out who was the best dressed guy and doll in New South Wales. So again we had a big function at the Hotel Australia – they flew out the Goldwyn Girls – and

then I put it on them that we should have Andy Ellis presenting the trophies to the winners. MGM said, "We can't do it, it's a trade name. We can't have trade names in a newsreel". But I said, "That's his name", and they agreed. So, when you talk about advertising, no greater ad could you get than in a world released newsreel – so we got that. We had every night, as I said, on Channel Seven and we had windows with glitter and velvet and the razzamatazz; our Christmas windows always stopped the traffic. And then we got – we had that Guy Mitchell, when he was in Australia we got him down. We had a tie specially made called the 'Mitchell Blue' tie - we must have sold fifty dozen in the short time he was in the area. I think we stopped the traffic and the police told me, "Be like the raven, never no more".

14.14 Anyway, when Guy came to the shop he said, "Come on, have whatever you like, it's all free" - and of course we had to stop that very quickly but it was a highly successful promotion. When you talk about getting the message, I think the best message you can ever get is a satisfied customer. And you go to remember that with this group of young people, unlike today, they dressed exceptionally well; they were suit conscious, shoe conscious, cufflinks and tie bars. (Phone rings) It's a totally different era; when you see young people today they couldn't care less.
(Break in tape) [Question missing]
Well, all our windows were tied in with MGM, Metro Goldwyn Mayer and we had these huge blowups of scenes of interest for their movie and sometimes we'd do a little bit of a, you know - whoever the star was - if were a movie, say, with Walter Pidgeon and so forth, "I bet he wishes he wore an Andy Ellis suit", things like that in the window. It got tremendous – people liked it, they loved it, and MGM were delighted.

15.35 Later on, though, when MGM ran into problems with movies because of television we had to forgo their use of our windows. So, I went to Twentieth Century Fox – they grabbed it, they took over from MGM - and we were very lucky because in that end of the city – let's face it – you don't have the amount of people passing your door like you do have further up in the city. That's why the rents are so much cheaper. But the fact was we did have a following and that helped and people would come down and look at the windows. We always seemed to have something and we decided at one stage to flood the window with money. And I rang up the broker who handled our insurance and so forth and he said, "Well, as long as you pin the notes to the garments and all the rest, the silver's going to be all over the floor, I mean, who's going to break a window for a handful of some silver?", and I said, "Down here they will, you know. There's a couple of wine bars opposite". He said, "Oh, rubbish, rubbish. Go ahead and do it". So, the window was smashed and only about three or four pounds of coins were stolen – and they said, "It's a fluke, it's

one-off, don't worry about it". But the second time they asked me could I call it off and we did.

17.15 But that got headlines in the paper: "City Store Trying to Give Money Away", and so on – made the front page in one or two of the papers. Of course, in those days you had the Daily Mirror and you had the *[Sydney Morning] Herald* and the morning *[Daily] Telegraph*.

RR: So, what was that – trying to give money away?

RJ: I forget what we tied it in with. It was some tie-in with some movie.

RR: Well, Ross was talking about – he reckoned there was a lot of counterfeit money around the time.

RJ: No, I don't think that would - - -

RR: And that was why they offered for a ten pound note for a dollar?

RJ: No, no, no, no. It wasn't anything to do with counterfeit, no, no, no, no.

RR: No, I wasn't saying it was. It was real money - - -

RJ: Yes.

RR: - - - but everybody thought it was counterfeit money. Only one person came in – that's according to Ross.

RJ: Well, when he said that, I mean, why was the window broken twice if they thought it was counterfeit money.

RR: I don't think it was broken the second time.

18.09 RJ: Yes, it was. Yes, we had it smashed twice. And another very successful promotion, which has never actually been done before, was that we had a lot of merchandise, broken ranges, etcetera, etcetera - like the big stores have today in their half yearly clearance etcetera - and I put in a big window with bookmaker boards and the betting board would have suits, shirts, ties, socks, underwear with question marks and then the merchandise would have a sign, saying, "This is the right price. How much would you like to pay for it?" And we were amazed that the public came in and offered us prices that were much, much better than we would ever have reduced them to. You got a few of the wise ones that would come in and something worth five pounds they'd offer you ten shillings for but you said, you know, "Have another go" - but in the main no reasonable offer was refused. I found people were very generous: a garment for, say, in those days five pounds, they'd offer you four pounds for it. We would have sold it on special for, say, two pounds - so, it was an amazing

sale. Unfortunately, the big stores couldn't do it because it'd be in the hands of too many staff and, you know, in a smaller store you've only got a handful of people and you can control it so easily. But that was very successful.

19.53 **RR: So, where did they go next? What sort of clothing did they go into next? What happened when, for instance, pop groups stopped wearing suits?**

RJ: Well, it went for a long while. I'd say that era went for a good eight, nine, ten years and then, of course, when the rot set in, that's when Andy decided he had to look elsewhere and he went for the dressage. I had moved on. I went to – I had a big offer made by Mark Foy's and I went to Mark Foy's as their controller of menswear – and I was with them for six years, then I had a very good offer from Myer and I went to Myer as a group menswear buyer - but Andy and I always kept in touch. Andy had a tooth much sweeter than mine. Well, I was pretty good and I'd often go in and have what he had and I'd take a fresh cream sponge with jam and passion fruit icing and we'd both get stuck into it. I can't tell you – Andy is – he was just a lovely person.

21.14 I think in my eulogy I made a statement - and I would keep to it – and that was "To know him was to love him" - he was just such a wonderful man. I recall one Christmas evening, the shop was closed, we'd had a bumper Christmas and Andy and - I think there was only the two of us, Andy and I, in the shop - congratulating each other on how successful we'd been, when there was mad thumping on the door and three of the staff from the workroom who'd received their holiday pay, their bonus, the lot, were hysterical. We let them in – and one girl had put her purse on the counter of the hotel and, of course, you know the rest. So, Andy said, "Is all this fuss over money? I thought you'd lost an arm or a leg. Are we discussing money?" And they said, "Yes, we've lost the lot, everything". He said, "Oh, well, don't worry about that". He opened the safe and he said, "I've been working day and night lately. I haven't had time to pick up my pay. I've got three weeks' pay there, you can have it. I think you may make a profit out of me" – and they did, they did. But that was Andy Ellis.

RR: How many did they have in the workroom upstairs?

RJ: Oh, in excess of twenty, yes. Very busy workshop, very busy.

22.53 **RR: And how did the clientele change over the years? Did you have a local clientele as well as the pop groups and the rock 'n' roll suits?**

RJ: Well, you must remember – well, you must remember that we went all out for the young people - young people would spend their last on

clothing. The older person mainly goes to a big store – he doesn't necessarily want to be the best dressed person in the street; he just wants to be well groomed. And the young people, they wore things that were quite daring; the big shoulders, the bodgie-type trousers. As I said, it was an era – you either went into it all the way or not at all and we went the full distance.

RR: When the flares came in you went straight -?

RJ: Oh, never stopped, yes.

RR: And when flares went out -?

RJ: Well, we had to alter. I mean, you, yes.

RR: What about when the Beatles came and they had narrow trousers again?

24.01 RJ: Yes, we had to alter again. I mean, the thing is that you don't make the decisions, the customer makes them, and you follow the trend. But when I look today, all I can say is that young people don't dress well any more at all. Where I am in this building – I'm the Secretary of the building – and we have security guards, they're all young, none of them owns a suit; if they need a suit they hire it. I mean, this is unbelievable - they just have a shirt and trousers. The knitwear - they put the knitwear, they tie it in a knot around their waist. The sunglasses they don't use for their eyes, they have it in their hair. It's an entirely new ballgame, they don't dress any more. Looking back when I was at Mark Foy's and Myer, we had a pyjama department - I doubt if the big stores have got such a thing today as a pyjama department. We had a sports coat department: on our huge days we could sell twelve to fifteen hundred sports coats when they were on special. I would say if you went a year you wouldn't sell twelve hundred sports coats today - knitwear has replaced sports coats.

RR: People do wear blazers sometimes.

25.40 RJ: Well, yes, yachting jackets, I s'pose – but I think you'd go broke if you just made them. Jewellery, the tie bars, cufflinks, where do you buy those today? There's no demand, people can't be bothered – they just use the button cuff, that's right, like you are - and I.

RR: I don't have a suit. I've only got a blazer.

RJ: Well, there you are. Well, I s'pose Fletcher Jones would have captured the blazer market.

RR: It's not now. It's some company that gets them made in Vietnam or Taiwan.

RJ: Do they really?

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RR: Yes, yes.

RJ: That's sad. But - - -

RR: Because you look inside there and it's got somebody Australian's name on them but inside it says "Made in Vietnam" or "Made in Laos".

RJ: Yes. When I was at Myer, I had a very big hat department. Well, I reckon today you'd go broke selling hats. The only demand appears to be for that akubra-type hat but apart from that - those beautiful velours and that from France and England, well, there's just no demand. People don't wear them.

RR: I live in Katoomba and there's a hat shop that the tourists pour into and it's got thousands of different types of hats.

26.52 RJ: Yes, well, that's – that's right, yes but that'd be novelty wear.

RR: Yes. It's right in the suburb too.

RJ: Yes, yes.

RR: I mean, it's on the road down to Echo Point, you know.

RJ: Yes, yes. But I'm talking about the really beautiful hats that we used to bring in; velours from France and from Italy and England. You'd go broke selling those today.

RR: Did Andy sell hats?

RJ: No, no, no. He sold dressage wear, yes, caps.

RR: What about jodhpurs?

RJ: No. He - - -

RR: Just the jackets?

RJ: Just the jacket, yes, yes.

RR: None of the hats?

RJ: He made an arrangement later on to get the hats made – velvet, they were beautiful, the velvet caps and so forth – 'cause he'd cater for the whole family; the father, the mother, the children. And, oh, they looked beautiful. Andy was a very adaptable person; he could change rapidly.

RR: What about his boats?

RJ: Oh, he loved his boats. I went with him once or twice. I'll repeat the raven again, "Never no more". Andy won all the trophies for the fastest. Andy would aim for the buoys - that's the B-U-O-Y-S - and when you had your heart in your mouth and you're about to make a hit then he'd turn – and of course he saved such valuable ground and he won all the races. But he was a daredevil.

28.24 **RR: But he used to sell those boats too.**

RJ: I didn't - - -

RR: I've got an ad here with 'Chickadee' on and you've got the specifications of the boat - - -

RJ: Mm.

RR: - - - and you'd have a choice of engines.

RJ: Well, that's since I left. That's not in my day.

RR: Well, what about when he sponsored 'Gelignite Jack Murray' in the Redex trial? Were you there then?

RJ: No, no.

RR: I've got a photograph.

RJ: Yes, yes. No, that – I was with Andy in the most exciting years and I could see the – and so could he – the tapering off of that era and I went to other fields, just as he did in the dressage.

RR: And when you left the business, was that the right time to leave, for you?

RJ: Yes. Andy said that the mercery had collapsed when I left.

RR: How many people did you have in the shop, apart from you?

RJ: You mean staff, selling staff?

RR: Yes.

RJ: In mercery or both?

RR: Well, both, yes.

RJ: Oh, seven or eight.

RR: It's a tiny shop. How'd you manage that?

RJ: Well, we had a lot of customers and sometimes we had to do the fittings upstairs in the workroom; the shop was too crowded.

RR: How many fittings?

29.52 RJ: Always gave them two, two fittings always. It was a remarkable era, a remarkable business. I remember we had to change bank managers. The manager Andy had when he was at Paddington, he never saw Andy's potential. He looked upon Andy as being a bit nutty, I think, that Andy had these grand ideas. So, I went and I spoke to the manager of Westpac – well, I think it'd be Bank of New South Wales in those days – and I convinced him we needed someone else to look after us, that we were terribly undercapitalised but we had a damn good business. And he sent for me one day, and he said, "I can't believe the business you're doing up there in that little bloody shop". He said, "It's unreal, it's unbelievable".

30.57 And when I opened the first shirt account with Whitmont – and they too were a bit panicky about a new account. They'd never heard of Andy because he was only in tailoring, never in mercery - and going from a workroom to a shop is a big change. That's why he needed somebody like me that had the experience of retail. I'm not trying to do something here about me but it is important when you go into retail that you have a retail background. I couldn't compete with Andy in his field and I don't think he could compete with me in my field, so we were very good, a very good combination.

RR: But you were both good at promotion?

RJ: That's right. And the bank manager said to me, "I can't accept these figures. Are you sure you're not robbing a bank?" And when we went to Whitmont – getting back to Whitmont – he said, "It's a new account. You've never actually had a shop before under the name of Andy Ellis. We'll only let you have six dozen shirts at a time and they've got to be paid for within seven days and there'll be no repeats until the account's paid". At the end of four months we were buying shirts, fifty and sixty dozen - and they often said to me they went to other shops in the area and said, "What's wrong with you boys? You're happy buying one or two dozen shirts. This bloke opens up and he's buying fifty and sixty dozen at a time and paying spot on". So, we became either famous or infamous, I'm not sure.

RR: Where did you eat when you went out to eat when you were at Andy Ellis's.

32.51 RJ: I used to eat on the premises.

RR: Didn't go out to the fish café?

RJ: No, Andy did that. Andy and I often would eat at the Tivoli Tavern - they used to make beautifully fresh sandwiches and tea – and we'd sit there and I reckon we chatted so much about ideas and that – but let me make it quite clear; Andy had many more ideas than I ever had but I had the gift of the gab. (Phone rings)

RR: And do you get any of the people who are performing at the Tivoli used to come in?

RJ: Roy Rene [Famous vaudeville artist known as 'Mo'] came in a lot. Roy never – Roy wouldn't buy our gear but he came in and gave us a good laugh; a brilliant man, Roy Rene, a very strong union man - he never liked Jack Davey because Davey wouldn't join a union. And Roy Rene was on a hundred pounds a week and the ballet were getting less than five pounds a week and Roy always thought the ballet was worth much more - and his dislike of Jack Davey was the fact that Davey only worried about Davy and didn't worry about anybody else, where Roy was a very human man. He was – he had the – a lot of people didn't realise that Mo's lisp was a natural, normal lisp and when he spoke to you you were covered in spit, but he was a remarkable man, remarkable. He had this gorgeous sense of humour.

34.39 I met him one day at Randwick Racecourse and I said, "Do you like anything, Roy?" "No", he said, "I'm great friends with Billy Cook, the jockey but", he said, "he always gives me losers, never gives me winners and if I saw him now I wouldn't be even bothered asking him". I said, "There he goes now". "Oh, Billy! Billy! Billy!", and down he ran to get the tip which he said was never any good anyway. Yes, a remarkable man.

RR: Any of the others from the Tivoli?

RJ: Not really. I mean, it wasn't their cup of tea.

RR: Because you didn't do any women's wear, so you didn't get the girls in?

RJ: No, we didn't have any women's clientele in those days.

RR: How did you go when you had the Guys 'n' Dolls? Who would dress the dolls in the competition?

RJ: Well, in that competition the girls wanted a tailored suit, tailored costume, so in the sense of again it was suits, a tailored suit for the girls. And in some of them they had a matching suit and they looked good - I tell you what - they looked terrific.

35.57 **RR: No Salvation Army uniforms?**

RJ: No, no, no.

RR: Of course, the girl in there, she had a Salvation Army in the first place.

RJ: Yes.

RR: Chequers was only just around the corner.

RJ: Yes.

RR: Did you ever go to any of the shoes there?

RJ: I did. I went to the Shirley Bassey show. I got there at, I think, for the eleven o'clock show – that was at night – and I sat there till the early hours of the morning. I saw both shows – she was just fantastic. See, that's all a lost era today. There's nothing like that any more, is there? Chequers was fantastic, some of the artists they brought out.

RR: Sinatra?

RJ: H'mm?

RR: Sinatra.

RJ: Yes, well Cranky Frankie, yes.

RR: But he used to be down at the Stadium too.

RJ: Yes, yes.

RR: And I once saw him at the Silver Spade in the Chevron up in the Cross.

RJ: Oh, yes, yes. When I think back, the Judy Garland one was a very sad one, wasn't it?

RR: Yes.

RJ: She was terribly off during her tour of Australia – a very sad part of Garland's life.

RR: Andy's later days down there – did you know anything about it, did you see after it? It must have been contracting greatly during his latter years.

37.17 RJ: Well, I went back to Andy, to work for Andy. I'd given away the big stores, Myer and Mark Foy's - they were too demanding. In a big

store, every day has to be a winning day and there's no such thing. I remember being with Myer and we had about eight or nine days of non stop rain and the merchandise director from Melbourne said to me, "What's wrong with your swimwear department?" I said, "Well, I wish you asked me what was right with our rainwear department. We're hundreds of per cent up there". He said, "No, no, no. We're talking about swimwear". Well, he knew that we couldn't sell swimwear when it was raining. So, I decided I didn't need it. It's too demanding – no one in retail can have every day a winner. So, I went back to Andy and reopened the mercery department and we were very successful and I stayed with Andy, I suppose, for six, seven years this last time. And I always said when I reached the age of sixty I'd retire, and I did. I'm retired ever since – I'm seventy six today. So - - -

RR: But you kept your eye on Andy?

RJ: Oh, yes, we'd go in with the cream cakes and everything, yes, yes.

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I saw Andy two or three times in hospital and the last time, well, Andy was no longer with us – although not officially dead he was anything but living. He was lying there and it was a very sad memory of a remarkable, wonderful man. It made me realise then that you lose a lot of faith: when you think a man, such a lovely man as Andy Ellis could have such a shocking death, it wasn't fair. Because Andy was in all respects, he was such a good man. You wonder who makes these decisions on life and death. But I've lost not only a tremendous supporter, I lost a great friend. I look back on Andy – there's a photo there of us all in the shop - (points to photograph) he looked very frail there.

RR: Oh, yes. And who's that on the left hand end there?

RJ: That boy, John. Earl was one of Andy's young boys in tailoring and that was my – one of my chief assistants in mercery. He now has Parkinson's; he's in a very bad way – very sad. That boy there said to me – I think he now is an electrician or plumber; he has his own business – and he said, "I look back with excitement of when we worked at Andy Ellis". He said, "It wasn't work. We just loved being in the shop, we loved meeting the people". He said, "You and Andy were so damned easy to work for and with", and he said, "When we did the windows at night" – because you couldn't do the windows by day; we were too busy - I used to take them out to a restaurant – in those days Cahill's or Henry Wolfe and we used to, oh, gee, we got stuck into everything; lobster, you name it, and the wonderful sweets, all the different things – and he said, "When I look back I think they were the best years of my life, working at Andy Ellis". See, they were young people serving young people and loving the merchandise they

were selling. So, actually it was a labour of love. It was teamwork at its best.

RR: All right. Well, I'll say thank you very much, Mr Rodney Jacobs.

Interview ends