ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Ann Ramsay

INTERVIEWER: Sue Rosen

PLACE: Redfern

DATE: 21 September 1994

TRANSCRIPT

TAPE 1

0.00 **SR:** **Interview with Miss Ann Ramsay at Redfern, 21st of September 1994.**

Hello, Ann. Ann, I understand that you grew up in Redfern.

AR: Yes, I grew up in Redfern.

SR: **What year were you born in?**

AR: ******** 1914.

SR: **Did you have any brothers and sisters?**

AR: Two sisters.

SR: **What are your earliest memories of Redfern?**

AR: What are my earliest memories?

SR: **Yes.**

AR: The dirt and the squalor.

SR: Really?

AR: I shouldn't say that. No, times were very hard then. Well, let's put it this way: my Dad worked in the tramway and things were pretty hard at that time. We were paying about fifteen shillings a week rent. I can't think of anything else to say.

SR: How old would you be when you first start remembering your life?

AR: When I start remembering my life?

SR: Yes, what age do you go back to in your memory – eight?

AR: When I first started school.

SR: So when you were five?

AR: Five year old, yes. I started school at Cleveland Street and I went there till I was twelve, thirteen, and from then I went to Sydney High.

SR: Whereabouts were you living, what street? When you were five, were you living in this house here?

2.04 AR: No, I was living in Marriott Street Redfern, just two streets away from here. Lived there until I was fourteen, then when I turned fourteen I came here.

SR: And you moved two blocks away?

AR: Two blocks away, yes.

SR: When you say "the dirt and the squalor", what do you mean in those very early days?

AR: Well, at that time there was no sweeping gutters or anything like that, there was nothing. You just had to look after your front yourself and there was no sweepers and no trees.

SR: There would have been horses around then too.

AR: Yes, there was horses, plenty of manure.

SR: Did that bring flies?

AR: Yes. We had horses in the back of this place. In fact, we had a fishmonger at the back of this place here. Next door but one there was a huge big carrier place, Gifford's – they were there for years.

Well, most of my neighbours are all gone. There's only one two doors up, Merly who used to live across the road – they've only moved across here. But all this part in the early days was known as Baptist Gardens and it was owned by the Baptist Church – that was in the very early days; probably it would have been before we were born – but these old houses around here around just on a hundred years old. But school days, well, Cleveland Street School, I've many memories of Cleveland Street School, the old times.

4.02 We had an old schoolteacher, she was our singing teacher, and she was a drunkard and she fell down the stairs one day, singing Annie Laurie. And funny things happened at that school.

SR: Tell us some of those things that happened at the school.

AR: Well, they were having a big marching day and they were having the inspectors from the Education Department to come out and see it and my friends had a dairy down the street and she had to wait – the father brought the cans and everything home before I'd go to school. Well, I always went to school very early but I waited I waited for Anne and the teacher had said that anybody that was late wasn't to come. So when we got down there it was well and truly late so we went to the old War Memorial, the one that has been shifted to Canberra.

SR: The War Memorial?

AR: Yes, and it was in Chalmers Street and next door to the Railway Institute, the old Railway Institute which is still there. You know where you cross over the road to go down the stairs to the railway station [Central]?

SR: Yes.

AR: Well, that is where the old War Memorial was and we stayed in there all day and the smell of the musk that was something terrible. For a long, long time my mother didn't know until somebody let it out and then I got belted.

SR: And what sort of war memorial was it – was it a building, was it?

AR: Oh, it was a huge building, huge building.

SR: Really?

AR: Oh, yes, very huge and it had all the war, the 1914 war it was all in it and the old airplanes and everything; everything was taken up to Canberra.

6.07 **SR: Really?**

AR: Yes.

SR: Is that building still there?

AR: No, that building's not there now, that was taken down, and on part of the ground there was built the old ice rinks and a skating rink and the pool is there at the present time now. And the old school is still exactly the same as what it was when I went to school.

SR: And you did all your primary years there?

AR: I did all my primary there. In those days it was called QC [Qualifying certificate] and then you went from QC to the high school. You had to pass two or three exams and I passed the exam and I got the pass to go to Sydney High. And Sydney High School was where the zoo was in the first place.

SR: At Moore Park.

AR: Did you know that?

SR: Yes, at Moore Park.

AR: Yes.

SR: Was that a selective school then?

AR: Fairly selective then, fairly selective then; you had to get a good pass to get there. Of course, you had to have your old uniforms and one thing and another – it was pretty good. But when I turned fourteen the Depression had started and, of course, I didn't go to work and my father was on the trams, as I said, and they went out on strike and when they went out on strike I had to go to work and the people next door they had fairly good intro into Raleigh Park and I got a job at WD & HO Wills and I was there for twenty years.

8.00 **SR: I know that place.**

AR: Do you?

SR: I've done a history on it.

AR: Yes, well, that's where I worked for twenty years. And then I can tell you some stories about the old places here. See, three doors up from us is where – I don't know whether you have heard of it – Mary MacKillop - - -

SR: Yes.

AR: - - - yes, well, she lived in one of the two-storey places about three doors up from me.

SR: Is she the one they're making a saint?

AR: Yes.

SR: Did you know her?

AR: Oh, no, no, that was before my time. No, that was well and truly before my time but one person I do know that you probably have heard of, Benny Wearing, the famous footballer. Well, he represented Australia and everything like that. Well, he lived in Bourke Street and my Mum and him went to school together. I don't know if I'm giving you any information that you wanted or anything.

SR: I've got some questions to ask about your family and it'll bring it through. Well, what sort of family do you come from? Your father worked on the trams and did your mother work?

AR: No, my Mum never worked.

SR: Right.

AR: No. It's a funny mixture. Her father's Scotch and her mother's Irish. They should be against one another, shouldn't they? And her father was a horse trainer; her brother was a horse trainer. They had stables out here in Kensington not very far from Raleigh Park and I used to ride the horses out on his day on the trackwork with him.

SR: That must have been fun.

AR: I was a tomboy.

SR: Were your parents religious?

AR: My father wasn't very religious, my mother was. My mother's a Catholic, so am I. And my grandmother, she was terrible: she was a real Irish Catholic. We were brought up strict Catholics.

10.09 **SR: So your grandmother was around when you were being raised?**

AR: Yes, my grandmother lived in Kensington for a long time. She lived in that house where I told you where Mary MacKillop lived - she was a housekeeper in there. She also did have a hotel in Devonshire Street in the early days – that was before I even knew her – and then she went a housekeeper to a lady that had a hotel on the corner of Bourke Street.

SR: Did you have a lot of family and relatives around you as you were growing up, was there an extended family around?

AR: We were a fairly united family, especially Mum's brother. You see, he was a trainer and they used to have a lot of parties out there and the jockeys and all used to go to them; it was really good.

SR: And you'd go to them too?

AR: Ooh, yes. And I loved dancing. I used to go dancing a lot and we used to go to Surreyville which was where the University of New South Wales is at the present moment. There was a huge big place there. You know the one just off Sydney Road?

SR: M'mm.

AR: Well, it's where the opening is that goes down. Well, all that was the big dancehall there then.

SR: Is it the University of New South Wales – Sydney University?

AR: No, the big university at City Road.

SR: Yes, Sydney University.

AR: What's that one called?

SR: Sydney University.

AR: Well, it was Sydney University, yes.

SR: Were your parents politically involved in any way?

12.06 AR: Dad was in the Labor Party for a while just as a participator and that was all.

SR: What sort of kid were you at home?

AR: Well, I was the one that had to do everything.

SR: Why was that?

AR: Well, after my last sister was born my mother was an invalid.

SR: What happened?

AR: Something to do with the birth, I think it was. She was very bad for a while. In fact, my sister, I brought her up.

SR: When you say your Mum was an invalid, could she get out of bed or does it mean she was bedridden?

AR: Oh, no, she could get out of bed, she'd do the work around, but she was an invalid. She had varicose ulcers, varicose legs, all those veins. But my second sister, we were very unlucky with her because she had this – I can't think of what you call it – she'd be fat one day and a week afterwards she'd be thin, you know that type of thing.

SR: As a child?

AR: Yes. At the time they never, ever knew anything about the disease that she had. It was one of those things that they didn't know anything about.

SR: And how old was she?

AR: It was a glandular trouble, she had glandular trouble, and there was no treatment whatsoever; they didn't know anything about it in the day. She was born in 1917 and she's been dead about twenty two years.

14.10 **SR: You were only five years old when she was born?**

AR: Yes, yes.

SR: And you sort of looked after her?

AR: I looked after the whole family.

SR: How old was the other sister?

AR: Nell. She's sixty four now.

SR: So what year was she born in?

AR: Thirty years ago [means 1930?]. Must be thirty, wouldn't it? Yes, she's sixty four, I think, sixty five now. She has Alzheimer's. Bad luck, really.

SR: So she was the youngest one?

AR: Yes, she was the youngest, she was the baby, yes. And she's got six boys and one girl.

SR: So you helped a lot around the house.

AR: Yes.

SR: And what sort of discipline was used in those days?

AR: What discipline did I get?

SR: Yes, if you're naughty what happened?

AR: They used the cat-o'-nine-tails on me.

SR: Like a belt or something?

AR: The belt with tails put on the bottom of it.

SR: Really?

AR: My word.

SR: They existed?

AR: They existed in those days.

SR: I didn't know.

AR: No, nobody thinks of those things but, gee, my father was strict.

SR: Where did they hit you with that – on the back or the legs?

AR: On the bum.

SR: On the bum. And what would you have to do to get that?

AR: Well, I can tell you one thing that I did do. I wasn't allowed to go out with boys and I wasn't allowed to go dancing and I had a boyfriend up the street and his mother let me use my shoes there and my dress there and I used to get dressed up there and go to Surreyville and this night we came home very late. My father met me up the top of the street there and belted me from the top of the street down home.

16.14 **SR: Gosh. How old would you have been when that happened?**

AR: Oh, about eighteen.

SR: Eighteen, goodness.

AR: Yes, I wasn't allowed to go out; I was supposed to be doing other things.

SR: At home, helping at home?

AR: Oh, yes, yes.

SR: But when you were a child, when you were younger, what would be a naughty thing as a young child, like say a ten year old?

AR: Well, I think the biggest trouble I got into was when the boys who were known as the Wanderers – they were the footballers in that time about five doors up – there was a big attic on the top of their place and they used to play two-up of a Sunday and we used to be their

lookouts and my Dad used to go mad on me every time I'd come home with the shilling in my hand. That was all I'd get looking out for if the police come around.

SR: And did the police ever come around?

AR: Yes, and they laughed at us. The boys got into trouble for playing two-up but they laughed at us.

SR: But they were children as well?

AR: Oh, no, they were footballers.

SR: They were men?

AR: Yes, they were maybe about twenty five or something there.

SR: Really?

AR: Yes.

SR: Well, did the police drag them away when they came?

AR: They didn't drag them away; they used to give them a lecture. They used to have – I forget the name of the hall; it was in South Dowling Street. We had this ……. …….. But these houses, the Heritage Society came around one time and they did take some photos of these places and I think it'll be about a hundred and eight years now.

18.26 **SR: In your family how were you expected to contribute as a child after your mother had the second baby?**

AR: Baby.

SR: Well, you would have helped with the first baby, the one who was born in 1917 and then you would have helped with the younger one.

AR: Actually, I was the odd one out. I used to get into all the trouble because if the sisters would do something wrong it wouldn't be them that'd get into trouble, it'd be me.

SR: So you were expected to help with them as well?

AR: Oh, yes, I was expected to look after them, really.

SR: How much younger than you were they? There was one five years younger and then there was one -?

AR: Well, Jean was about five and Nellie was only a baby and she was so tiny that they never thought that she'd live. Gee, she was tiny. I don't know whether I'm being any good to you or not.

SR: No, you are, you're fine, it's great. Well, what did the family do for fun – you went to your relatives' place at Randwick?

AR: No. In the early days we used to go out to La Perouse and we'd go out on one of those open drays. The chap down the street used to be a fruit marketer. On the Sunday he'd collect us all around and we'd all go out, sit with our feet hanging out the back of the car, there'd be about twelve, fifteen of us on the back of a car and we'd go out to La Perouse.

20.17 **SR: All the local neighbourhood kids?**

AR: Yes, all the local neighbourhood kids. We'd go out to La Perouse, we'd have a picnic out there; it used to be good there.

SR: Did your parents go as well?

AR: No. There only used to be Mr Marsh and a couple of mothers of the kids. My mother and father usen't to go because Dad used to be on shiftwork and that.

SR: What did a family do in the evening? These days everybody watches TV. Did you have tea in the evening; did you have your main meal?

AR: We had tea in the evening, yes.

SR: And what would you do after tea?

AR: Go to bed.

SR: Really?

AR: There was nothing much on then. We had one of those cat's whisker wireless, you know, funny little wirelesses. We had a gramophone, the old gramophones, which I still have.

SR: They were quite rare in those days. Were there radios before 1920?

AR: Yes, it was like a cat whisker thing, a funny little thing, real funny.

SR: And what would you listen to on the radio?

AR: 2UE.

SR: It's still around.

AR: Yes.

SR: In the summer, would you be allowed to play outside in the street?

AR: Yes, we used to play hopscotch, get around in the streets there.

SR: Until it got dark?

AR: Then we're brought inside.

22.00 **SR: Where did your father have to go to work, where did he go to do his work?**

AR: Dowling Street Depot for Waverley Depot. When he first started work it as at Port Macquarie. Do you know where the Opera House is now?

SR: Oh, yes.

AR: Around there, yes.

SR: Fort Macquarie.

AR: Fort Macquarie.

SR: Did he like his job, your father?

AR: It was just a job, I think. He was a tram guard for a while, he was on the footboards because we had the old fashioned trams with the old footboards and they ran along here for years and years. In fact, when I used to go to work at Willses we were lucky if we got a toehold on the footboard.

SR: Sounds a bit dangerous.

AR: It was dangerous in those days.

SR: People get hurt?

AR: No.

SR: No?

AR: No, not half the amount of accidents like there was on the buses.

SR: The buses would have accidents?

AR: My word. They do now.

SR: Can you describe your mother's working day?

AR: My Mum's working life?

SR: Working day, yes. What would she do in a day?

AR: Well, in this house here we had no electric light, no gas. We only had those lamps, you know, the big lamps with the glass tops on them, kerosene lamps. And also you cooked on a stove, not gas or anything like that; it was just a wood stove. And when you did your washing you did your washing in a wood copper.

SR: Where did you get the wood from?

24.00 AR: The old wood and coal man used to come 'round and you'd buy a bag of wood and a bag of coal.

SR: Were your family well-off, to be able to buy all that stuff?

AR: Oh, yes, we were able to buy that. It wasn't very long before the landlord put the gas in - if you look in the hall you'll see the pipe still hanging down. We had the gas through the house and then later on my Dad got the electric light put on.

SR: So you were renting this house?

AR: We were renting this place for fifteen dollars a week.

SR: And then you eventually bought it?

AR: Yes, I bought it – well, it must be twenty five years I've owned it. I went without everything, I had no new clothes. See, Mum was in hospital, Dad had died and I had my sister here. It was exactly twelve months after Mum died that my sister died and they said that she fretted after her mother. Of course, then I was left on my own and I've took in a lady for a while – I had her for about ten years – and then I was left on my own for the rest of the time.

SR: And no one in your family got married – you all stayed together as a family?

AR: Yes. I was engaged but I wouldn't leave my mother.

SR: Because she was unwell?

AR: Yes. She wasn't able to look after the house or that.

SR: Was your mother a happy woman?

AR: Oh, she was happy. Yes, she was happy all right.

26.01 **SR: And what about your father?**

AR: He was happy at times. I used to say he was a cranky old bugger.

SR: Well, what made him cranky?

AR: Me.

SR: Do you think – why?

AR: Because I wouldn't do things that he wanted me to do.

SR: Like housework?

AR: Housework, everything, yes. No, I had a hard time.

SR: And what made you tolerate it?

AR: What made me -?

SR: Well, you stuck with it; you stuck with your family.

AR: Oh, yes, I stuck with it. I wouldn't leave my Mum.

SR: Well, how would you describe your family life as a child?

AR: I didn't have a bad life as a child. We kept together and my sisters, well, we grew up together, we did everything together. We'd go to the pictures of a Saturday afternoon up at the Premium which was about sixpence in.

SR: Did you have any other friends? You went out with your sisters and were there other friends in the neighbourhood - who were the kids in the neighbourhood?

AR: I used to go out with some of the girls up the street.

SR: What were their names? Is this in the period up to about 1920 – you were fourteen, so into the 1920s?

AR: Well, my neighbour next door but one this side, Merly, well, we've been friends ever since we were about six year or seven year old. And then there's Jeannie Blair further up the street again; she's been friendly all her life too.

SR: So you used to go to the movies. Where did you go?

28.02 AR: Crown Street, yes, up in Crown Street. The first one we went to used to be in Cleveland Street and it was called the Empire. And then the old Crown used to be in Cleveland Street down this end where the

mall is now and then they shifted up to Crown Street, Surry Hills and that was the Premier.

SR: And would you be going to the movies with your friends say when you were around ten years old?

AR: Oh, yes.

SR: And were you allowed to go out and about with your friends without your parents?

AR: Oh, yes, Saturday afternoon, yes.

SR: And where did you get the money to do that?

AR: Well, it only cost us sixpence to go in and Mum'd give us sixpence and thruppence to get an ice cream.

SR: And you'd do that regularly?

AR: Oh, yes.

SR: Sounds good.

AR: Yes. When you think of an ice cream cone only costing you thruppence it's a big deal of difference, yes.

SR: What else did you do together with your friends?

AR: Go for hikes.

SR: Really, where?

AR: Down to national park.

SR: The Royal [National Park]?

AR: Yes.

SR: How would you get there?

AR: We'd go by train to - - -

SR: Waterfall?

AR: - - - Sutherland and we'd hike from Sutherland down. We'd go to a place called Burning Palms, go for a swim. And you had to hike up all these big rocks and that to get back up; then hike back to Sutherland to get the train when you were going home.

SR: That would take all day.

AR: Oh, but it was beaut. Oh, yes, we used to think that was wonderful.

SR: Would you do that very often?

AR: Well, we belonged to a lodge. You know how they used to have – you've heard of the lodges – well, we used to belong to a lodge called Young Eureka [Masonic?] and it was held up in the Waterloo Town Hall.

30.07 And I took part in that, really, went through it. Like, you start off as looking after the door as conductor as they call them. Then you went from there, warden, and then you went from there to vice grand, then noble grand, then past grand and then you'd get a red satin emblem thing. And then you'd go into the adult one which was held in the Redfern Town Hall.

SR: And how old were you when you were a member of the lodge?

AR: From eight year old.

SR: And did it work like a friendly society where they help with pharmaceuticals?

AR: It was a friendly society, yes, it was a friendly society.

SR: What else would they do aside from helping with pharmaceuticals?

AR: We had a pharmaceutical down in Cope Street. Do you know Cope Street?

SR: I've heard of it.

AR: That's Redfern.

SR: What else did the lodge do?

AR: Well, we used to have picnics. We'd go out to La Perouse and then the big picnic we'd have at Balmoral and we used to have the big picnic about once a year and that was absolutely fabulous. All the kids, there'd be hundreds and hundreds of kids go from all the different lodges around and mostly they'd hire the big ferry, we'd go over on the ferries, and it was good.

SR: What sort of food would you have on an occasion like that?

AR: On that. Oh, they'd make sandwiches and lemonade. The lemonade was water – it was lemon floated over it, you know.

32.08 **SR: Can you remember any adventures that you had as a child?**

AR: Adventures I had as a child?

SR: Off doing things with your friends. What would be the things that the kids in this neighbourhood would do when they were out of the sight of their parents?

AR: Throw things at one another.

SR: Really – gang wars?

AR: Yes. What we didn't like we'd sneak onto somebody else's plate when they weren't looking.

SR: Did you roam far from the house; did you have much freedom to wander around?

AR: Oh, yes. We used to go over to Moore Park. You've seen them skiing down the hills over at Moore Park [reference to artificial snow slopes in 1990s]. How old would I be then? About eight. We used to take the old tin trays that Mum had and we'd sit on the tin trays and somebody'd get a push and we'd go down all those hills. We did all those and I'd come home and have the behind out of my pants and I'd get belted – hole in my pants. Oh, yes, we had fun over there on the hills.

SR: Yes, it sounds great.

AR: Oh, yes. That park was a godsend because we used to play vigaro over there and go and watch the football of a Sunday. My young sisters were the worst. They didn't believe in our church – the youngest one was the worst, really – and they used to have the evangelists over there of Sunday. You'd go over there of a Sunday afternoon and they'd have this big circle with all the kids in a circle and they'd sing all the hymns about the place. My younger sister'd walk down the street singing the songs and I'd say, "They're not ours, they're not ours".

34.18 **SR: As Catholics, were you allowed to play with Protestant children?**

AR: Oh, it didn't make any difference to me.

SR: Did it matter to you parents, though?

AR: No, no, no. Oh, no, no, my Mum wasn't bigoted.

SR: Did you go to a Catholic school – no, you went to a state school.

AR: No, I went to a public school. I went to a Catholic school for one whole fortnight.

SR: And what happened?

AR: I came home and told my father I was not going to school any more, he'd have to find me somewhere else that I was going; I wasn't going to be down on my knees all the time.

SR: How old were you?

AR: I was about eight.

SR: You were very determined.

AR: Oh, I was determined. That's when I went to Cleveland Street. Yes, I went to Cleveland Street all the time.

SR: And you started at the Catholic school. You must have been five then when you did that.

AR: Yes, yes, started up at St Peter's, Surry Hills.

SR: And how long did you stay there for?

AR: Only about a fortnight.

SR: Right, that's the one?

AR: Yes, only about a fortnight but I went every Sunday to church just the same – didn't make any difference.

SR: Did your mother go to mass?

AR: Mum went to mass, yes. Dad didn't. Dad was a Mason.

SR: Really?

AR: Yes.

SR: He was Scottish.

AR: Yes.

SR: What do you know about Masons?

35.49 AR: Well, all I could think about it was when Dad joined up the Masons we said to him, "What do you do?" He said, "Ride the pig's back" and that's all I knew.

SR: Did you have any toys as a kid?

AR: Oh, yes, we had plenty of toys.

SR: And what sort of things?

AR: Beautiful dolls, teddy bears.

SR: Did most kids have them?

AR: Oh, yes. Not as many. I had the uncle out in Kensington. He was a sea captain and every year he came home he'd bring us all back something. I had my doll until about two years ago. It was one of those pink kid bodies with the china face and the long gold curls and I gave it to my first niece that came along.

SR: Did your toys mostly come from your relatives or from your parents?

AR: Parents.

SR: And the relatives as well, they'd give odd things?

AR: Not only that. Like the lodge always had a very good Christmas tree and we'd always get toys off the Christmas tree.

SR: And was that the situation for most of the kids in the neighbourhood?

AR: Oh, no, there were some poor kids around this way.

SR: Because when we first started you said your earliest memories were of poverty. Unless I've got it wrong, your early memories of Redfern were of poverty.

38.07 AR: Well, there was a great deal of poverty here, there was a great deal of poverty.

SR: But you weren't, your family weren't?

AR: No, we weren't poverty-stricken. The only time that I'd say that we had a hard time was when the Depression came along Dad was out on strike and we had to go and get – see, there was no dole, there was definitely no dole. You would be given a voucher and that voucher'd say you were allowed so much butter, so much bread or anything that you wanted as far as feeding your children. We used to have to go up to the grocer shop in Cleveland Street and you'd just go there and put your voucher in and you'd get whatever you wanted, not like it is now. There was no dole and as far as that was concerned there were no kiddies that had nothing to eat because they were able to get the voucher.

SR: You know the First World War period? Your father, was he affected by the war in any way, did he have to fight?

AR: No.

SR: Have you any memories of the war, First World War or troops coming back?

AR: No.

SR: You would have been six.

AR: See, I'd only be about three.

SR: What about the influenza epidemic in 1919 – can you remember that?

AR: What'll I be then?

SR: Six.

AR: If I'd be six.

SR: Or five.

AR: No, no. As far as war is concerned, the most memories I have was the - - -

SR: The second one?

AR: Yes, I would have. When the war finished I worked in the Catholic United Service Auxilliary.

40.05 **SR: Is this the Second World War?**

AR: Yes. See, I could remember the Second World War.

SR: But the first one as a child you can't remember anything?

AR: No, no.

SR: Did you have any relatives as you grew up, say as you were getting up to eight, nine and ten years old, were there any relatives in the family who had been away in the First World War?

AR: Yes, yes, uncles.

SR: Did you hear any stories from them?

AR: No.

SR: Were they O.K. or were they damaged in any way?

AR: No, one had been gassed.

SR: And what did that mean?

AR: Oh, it was shocking. Well, they had like asthma type of things and things like that; the gas going down the lungs, they had damaged lungs.

SR: Could he work?

AR: No, he was on a pension. But as the second one, well, I can tell you a bit about that because, as I said, I was in the Auxilliary and we were working the canteen down at Cusor House and used to cook for the men on Sundays and Saturday we worked in the hospital at Lewisham; I was on the wards in Lewisham and I did Casualty at St Vincent's and Lewisham.

SR: Were you conscripted by Manpower in the Second World War, the Manpower organisation, were you conscripted by that?

AR: No, I was working there, I was working then. That was when I was working out of Willses.

SR: Right. Cigarettes for the war effort.

AR: Yes.

42.04 **SR: I'm going through all these questions about what you would have done with your friends. As a child, were there any places you were not allowed to go?**

AR: Well, we weren't allowed out on our own. We had to have some of the kids with us and mostly there was always an elder one with us but we weren't allowed out very much on our own.

SR: And did your family know everybody else in the neighbourhood?

AR: Oh, yes. It was very close, this little section here.

SR: Were there people that you had to avoid?

AR: No, I don't think I ever had anybody that we had to avoid.

SR: Were there any colourful local characters?

AR: Never heard anything about anything bad in those days.

SR: No crims around the place?

AR: Oh, yes, Kate Smith but actually she didn't live in this section, she lived in Surry Hills. That was Kate Smith and Tilly Devine.

SR: Was it Kate Leigh, do you mean?

AR: Kate Leigh and Tilly Devine. Kate Leigh was wonderful to the kids around this area.

SR: Did you know her?

AR: Yes. I'll tell you a little story about them too. Our priest up there at St Peter's Church, he was a bit of a larrikin. He used to get around on a motorbike and Kate Leigh had bought him the motorbike. And one time there Kate Leigh's brother was staying with her and somebody had told him that Kate Leigh was sick and he said he'd go up and see her and he went up to Kate Leigh's place, knocked on the door, and a man's voice come out – it was the son – and he said, "Who's there?" and of course Father said, "The priest" and he thought he said, "The police" and he threw a bucket of water over him. Yes, I can remember that as plain as anything. He told us that over the pulpit.

44.21 **SR: The priest did?**

AR: Yes. But she was very good to the people 'round there.

SR: Well, when they say she was involved in crime, what was it that she was supposed to do?

AR: Sly grog.

SR: That was in the days of six o'clock closing.

AR: Yes.

SR: Was that such a bad thing?

AR: Oh, yes.

SR: Well, what made it so bad? I mean, now it's legal.

AR: No, I don't know. We used to have a place up there where the big flats are now and it was called The Pottery and they used to go up there and play two-up and she'd sell them the beer.

SR: And that's it?

AR: That was in the early days.

SR: What years are we talking about with that?

AR: Well, I was going to school then so it'd be my school days.

SR: Primary school?

AR: Yes. They were known as bad characters.

SR: Were they into prostitution?

AR: Oh, yes.

SR: And what about drugs, like cocaine or something like that?

AR: You never, ever heard anything about that. No, I think that's only been in this period; I think this period would be the worst.

SR: As a child, did you know that she was running brothels? Were you aware of sex as a child?

AR: I just thought she was having a lot of people going to her place, that's all.

46.02 **SR: But she wasn't a prostitute. She would have ran it.**

AR: No, she ran it.

SR: Yes. As a child, did you have any sex education?

AR: No, no.

SR: So what happened even when you were getting ready to menstruate?

AR: It was the biggest shock I ever had in my life, I think, because your own mother should have told you but they never told you.

SR: So what did you do? Did you think you'd got a dreadful disease or something?

AR: I ******** I think. That shouldn't go in, though.

SR: Well, everybody's saying the same thing.

AR: Yes.

SR: Was that traumatic then for you?

AR: Oh, yes, I'll say it was.

SR: Were you able to come out and say something to your mother?

AR: Oh, yes, I went out to my mother. She went and got some things and told me, "You're growing up now".

SR: And that's it?

AR: That's it.

SR: You know at the school, at the Cleveland Street School, how did the teachers treat you?

AR: Pretty good. They weren't bad; they were very good teachers, really, very high class education.

SR: Did you get caned?

AR: Only once.

SR: So it wasn't a frequent thing?

AR: No, it wasn't a regular thing.

SR: And what were some of the good things at school? Did they have sports days?

AR: We had sports days, singing. We had a choir down there and I was in the choir at the time and we won two Eisteddfods.

SR: Now, if you're going to talk about this neighbourhood, how would you describe the neighbourhood? Was it residential or industrial or mixed and were people renting or did they own it?

48.07 AR: Very few people owned their own home. No, very few people owned their own home. I think there was only one up the top of the street that owned their own home, nobody else, very few.

SR: Was it hard for people to make a go of it? Was it a struggle or were people well-off and managing?

AR: Well, you look at it in this light: we paid fifteen shillings a week. The highest rent we paid here was when he did the house through and put the gas on and it went to thirty shillings but most of the places were only fifteen shillings – some of them were only paying seven and sixpence.

SR: But how much were they earning, what was a wage then?

AR: The wages weren't very high.

SR: So would they be paying like twenty per cent of their income in rent or twenty five per cent?

AR: No, I wouldn't say they paid a heck of a lot because they'd get a fair wage. Some of them had good jobs, some didn't.

SR: So people were comfortable?

AR: They were comfortable.

SR: And they were working class people, workers?

AR: Definitely working class people; this was definitely a working class area.

SR: But people were comfortable and happy?

AR: Yes. You never heard much trouble, never heard squabbles like there is now.

SR: Was there any industry around here?

AR: Yes. Oh, my word.

SR: Tell us.

AR: We had the printing place in Marriott Street, we had Murray Brothers and Thomas(?) who were the big engineering firm, Reckitt's Blue, Schweppes, Marchant's, Gartrell White's, the brewery.

50.08 **SR: Did that brewery put out smells?**

AR: My word it did. Not only smells but dirt.

SR: Did most of the people work locally?

AR: A lot of them worked locally, yes, a lot of them worked locally.

SR: Would you say it was a safe neighbourhood?

AR: Oh, yes. You never heard of anything like getting mugged or anything like it does now.

SR: What about burglaries?

AR: Yes, we had burglars – yes, I've been burgled. I was away in Queensland when I was burgled - - -

SR: That was good.

AR: - - - and I came home and everything was on the floor and the bedroom, the mattress was ripped apart, looking for money.

SR: What smells can you remember?

AR: What smells? The malt from the brewery, the hot bread being baked. Where the Centre is at the present moment was a baker's.

SR: What Centre is that – the council?

AR: Ron Williams', that was a bakehouse. I used to go over there first thing; soon as I knew that the bread was baked I'd go over and he'd give me all the bits of dough – I was only young then.

SR: Could you go around to places like that, like shops? Were the shopkeepers and owners your friends?

AR: Oh, yes.

SR: So as a little kid they'd give you things?

AR: Yes, you'd go over to the grocer's over the road and you'd pay your bill but they usen't to take money every day. They'd let your money go to the end of the week and at the end of the week you'd go over to pay your bill and you'd get a big bag of broken biscuits.

52.04 Hundreds and thousands, it used to be little biscuits with hundreds and thousands on them and one with jelly and that, Honey Jumbles and things like that. You wouldn't have to pay for them; they'd just give them to you.

SR: Encourage you to pay your bill.

AR: Yes.

SR: Are there any particular sights or images that you have in your mind? When you think back to your childhood, if you imagine any sort of image in your head, is there anything that comes to mind?

AR: Going to the [Royal Agricultural Society] Show.

SR: Did you do that every year?

AR: Oh, never missed out going to Sydney Show - it wasn't like it is now.

SR: What was it like?

AR: Not half the size, not half the things that are there now and you used to be able to go and buy a showbag for sixpence which you couldn't do now.

SR: No. Did the whole family go to the Show?

AR: No. Mum didn't bother very much but Dad used to take us; the three of us'd go together.

SR: Did your Mum go out much at all? It doesn't sound like it.

AR: Yes, Mum went out.

SR: Where would she go?

AR: She'd go for picnics with us. We'd go out to Bronte, swimming, go swimming and Dad used to work on the tram they had out there and he used to go out early in the morning and put the tent up and we'd go out there, spend the day out there.

SR: That sounds lovely.

AR: It used to be beaut.

SR: Yes. Where else would you go? Did you swim in that Bronte pool there at the beach?

AR: Yes, go to the pool at Bronte, yes. I used to go in the baths because I like swimming.

SR: And where else would you go as a family?

54.06 AR: Balmoral. That was a good Sunday and we'd go over on the boat over to Balmoral – it used to be nice. And the zoo, I used to love going to the zoo.

SR: The Moore Park Zoo?

AR: No, the big zoo, Taronga Park.

SR: When did that open?

AR: I don't know but I know I'd be about twelve or thirteen when we were going.

SR: Now, think back to when you were a child around here. What are the sounds that you can hear if you take yourself back?

AR: The clang-clang of the trams, mostly. No traffic like there is now, nothing like it is now and half the neighbourhood didn't have cars. We had the horse and cart, the horse and carts used to be here and the buggies and the sulkies. We used to go out in the old sulky from over the road. There was one house in Kepos Street and he had about twenty buggies in his place; old Mr Norman, he had a lot of horses. And the wood and coal man and the rabbitoh, the clothes peg man.

SR: Do you mean the clothes prop man or clothes pegs?

AR: Pegs.

SR: Pegs?

AR: Yes. He used to come around with the clothes props and pegs.

SR: Was that in the Depression or before the Depression?

AR: No, that was before the Depression. That was their job, the coal man.

SR: Did your family have a horse and sulky?

52.02 AR: No. No, I rode the horses out at my uncle's place.

SR: And you'd go out there quite often, wouldn't you?

AR: Yes, I'd go with the horse out to Brighton Beach and swim it in the Brighton water.

SR: Can you remember any big events of your childhood?

AR: Well, one big event that I can remember was when the Queen [Elizabeth II] did come out here with Prince Phillip. Up on the corner up here where the mall is now, that was Wunderlich's, the people that make all these ceilings and everything like that, and we sat outside there for a devil of a long time.

SR: Wasn't that in the '50s?

AR: Yes.

SR: But in your childhood were there any memories, any big events?

AR: Childhood memories?

SR: But that was the big event, the Queen and Prince Phillip?

AR: That was a big event, that was one of the biggest events.

SR: Are you still a royalist, are you a royalist?

AR: Yes, to a certain extent. I can't see in lots of ways how it's going to make much difference to us if we get away from them, same as I'm not very keen on them changing the flag.

SR: Well, going back to your childhood, any big events that happened when you were a child, festivals or anything that stands out?

AR: Yes. Well, one of them was the good times that we had with the policemen up in the police barracks there. They used to put on the Christmas party for us every year.

SR: The police?

57.52 AR: Yes. And we used to go up there and I'd take the little kids up – not my sisters but a lot of the other kids I used to take them up and get them put on the horses and drive them around the police barracks there. Oh, the attitude of the police in those years was entirely different to what they are now; they were friends.

SR: Were they viewed as friends by the neighbourhood?

AR: Yes, anything happened they were always there for us.

SR: Can you name any police that you knew – do you know any of the names of any of the ones that were particularly liked?

AR: I knew a lot of them because they used to come down from their country homes – most of the country boys – and they resided with friends of mine over in Kepos Street. And there was Big Jim – what was Jim's name? – he won a medal in one of the Olympics for wrestling. There's him, quite a few of them – I couldn't name them offhand - Bumper Farrell [well-known first grade footballer and police detective with questionable reputation] lived around that way too.

SR: He was much later, wasn't he? Bumper Farrell would have been there - - -

AR: My age.

SR: Yes.

AR: Yes, my age.

SR: Did I ask you about any local characters?

AR: Well, the only local characters, as I said, was Tilly Devine and that.

SR: Where did most people do their shopping?

AR: Little shops. We had a butcher shop, fish and chip shop, grocer shop and bootmakers' and a fruit shop on this corner; that's all there was.

SR: What would be a typical meal? The main meal of the day, what would you generally have for your main meal?

60.09 AR: Oh, gee, you're asking me to talk back a long way. We used to love our fish and chips, chops, sausages – sausages mostly.

SR: Veg, did you have any vegetables?

AR: Yes, yes, I always had vegetables, potatoes and pumpkin and cauliflower.

SR: Did you grow them yourselves?

AR: No.

SR: At that time, with everybody using wood fires and the horses and whatever and industry using coal, it must have been pretty polluted around here, the air, was it?

AR: Well, no, we didn't think it was putrid but the front verandahs would be filthy but you wouldn't think of it as being putrid - - -

SR: No, polluted.

AR: - - - because we'd never, ever heard of pollution then. It's only in the last latter years that we've heard it called pollution.

SR: But in the mornings when you went out would it be smoky and murky?

AR: Murky.

SR: More so than it is now?

AR: Oh, yes. Well, there was more factories going before than what there is now because, see, the brewery had the big smokestacks, Reckitt's Blue had the big smokestacks, the bakery had the big stokes next to it. See, there's none of those now because they've all pulled down.

SR: Did people get a lot of bronchial kind of infections and asthma?

AR: Yes, there was a lot of bronchitis and asthma.

SR: More so than now, do you think?

AR: I don't think so.

SR: Not more.

AR: Because there's definitely more pollution now than what there was in the younger - - -

SR: Was there any major change that you witnessed as a child, any development that changed the character of the place?

62.08 AR: Oh, yes, the high-rising definitely.

SR: That would have been in the '50s, '60s?

AR: Yes, it would be, yes. Because we had houses right along Morehead Street, right along Young Street.

TAPE 2

SR: As a child, just thinking back generally, would you say that you were happy?

AR: Oh, yes, yes, I was happy.

SR: And what would be your saddest memory?

AR: When my father died.

SR: And what about your most vivid memory?

AR: I think the most vivid memory when I was at work and they told me that I was wanted at the hospital for my mother and I couldn't get a taxi or anything to take me to the hospital to see her and when I did get a taxi I was held up on the Pyrmont Bridge and I had to be on the one side of Pyrmont Bridge for I don't know how long. And Mum was in what is Silverwater Prison now – that was called the old ladies' home, old women's home or something – and when I got there she was dead.

SR: Gee. When was that?

64.03 AR: Well, I was working at Coles at that time.

SR: So we're talking about the '50s?

AR: Well, she's been dead twenty five years.

SR: '60s or '70s almost.

AR: Would have been the '60s, I think.

SR: Late '60s, yes. What's your happiest memory from your childhood?

AR: The day I gave my young sister her wedding, that was my happiest day. I've had plenty of happy days, really, different things I do.

SR: Is there anything else that you'd like to say about the 1920s and your memories of Redfern from that time?

AR: Well, the change in Redfern is so terrific. We never heard so much about racial; nobody was like that as far as the blacks was concerned in that time and everybody just seemed to get in together and you never, ever thought of "Oh, this side of Redfern is black Redfern, this side of Redfern is different"; we never thought ourself superior because we were over this side. Then it gradually got worse and worse. I hated – I'll tell you straight – I hated to say I lived in Redfern

and even now when I meet people and they say to me, "Oh, where do you live?" "I live in Redfern". "That place?" "No, I don't live over that side. I live in East Redfern now", because we've been told we can call ourselves East Redfern now.

66.04 **SR: And why did you want to differentiate?**

AR: Why do I want it?

SR: Yes.

AR: Well, you hear people running down the other side about Eveleigh Street, the terrible things that goes on over that side of Redfern. They live our life, we live our life.

SR: Were there Aboriginal people in Redfern in the 1920s that you can remember as a child – did you go to school with any Aboriginal kids?

AR: No, there wasn't very many Aboriginal kiddies that I can remember going to school with us, although I had one girlfriend that was an Aboriginal. Her mother was an Aboriginal, Mary was white, and Mary married one of the warders from Long Bay Jail. They had a little boy first and he was white; a little girl came next and she was as black as the ace of spades. Mary's mother was very, very black but yet I couldn't have had a better friend than what she was.

SR: So were there many Aboriginal people in Redfern around the '20s?

AR: No, I don't think – they might have been over the other side but we never, ever seen them. We had a black tracker that used to live down in the other end of Phillip Street but I'll tell you this: they gave him a hell of a life.

SR: What do you mean?

AR: Well, people just looked down on him because he was black. He was living in one of the houses just down the road and they used to put notices outside his place, "Get rid of them", yet he was a black tracker.

SR: And, what, they just didn't like him because he was black?

AR: That's all, that's all that was wrong. A better man you couldn't have wished to meet; I admired him.

SR: How did he cope with that?

AR: I think he found it very hard.

68.01 **SR: Did he have white friends in the area?**

AR: Oh, yes. There was a lot of us were very friendly with the whole family. No, not like it is over the other side. Because I feel a lot of it is brought on themselves - it's terrible. You know those shops over in Redfern Street where all those nice shops are? You can't go over there, walking down looking without one coming up to you saying, "Can you give me a dollar?" And as for Cope Street, well, that's terrible. The girls that work in the factories there in Cope Street, their boss has to come out with them on payday; that's what give it a bad name. Otherwise I don't think they're so bad, it's just their bad luck that they've been born black skin, that's all.

SR: O.K.

AR: I'm not racist, far from it.

SR: Yes, I certainly gets a lot of media attention.

AR: Yes, that's what it is, it's media. Some of them, though, one of them, he's more white than he is black that's caused a lot of the trouble.

SR: What I think what we should do, I want to thank you very much for your time.

AR: Yes, I don't think I've given you very much.

SR: No, you've been wonderful, it's great.

AR: I don't feel I've given you as much of Redfern as I could have.

Interview ends