ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Frank Altoft

INTERVIEWER: Sue Rosen

PLACE: Erskineville

DATE: 22 November 1994

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR:** **- - - at Erskineville, 22nd of November 1994 two days before he turns eighty.**

Hello, Mr Altoft. When did you first come to Erskineville?

FA: We came to Erskineville in 1936 I came to here. I lived in Newtown, Chalder Street, Newtown from 1932 to about '36 and then I came – because this was all the one area. I lived in Chalder Street and then I had to move for a while with my grandmother and we moved to Camperdown to English Street Camperdown which is no longer there now – the hospitals have taken the place over.

SR: **And what was Newtown like in 1932?**

FA: Well, Newtown was a very good centre, you had plenty of movement. There was Hattie's Arcade which had three floors – there was a dancing school on it. Also, there was the Sunshine Club with Andy Moore(?) and Cy(?), Uncle Cy, and they ran the Sunshine Club for a few years there in the Depression time.

SR: What did the Sunshine Club do?

FA: Well, the Sunshine Club was a club where people gathered together to socialise and help one another. They ran raffles and they ran little concerts and everything to get money for people what was being ejected from their houses because they couldn't pay their rent or something like that.

SR: Were you here when the Unemployed Workers' Movement barricaded that house in the Depression time when people were being evicted? Can you remember anything of the eviction fights?

2.11 FA There was quite a few. One of the great people, councillors, in Newtown was the Mayoress of Newtown was Lilian Fowler and she did a terrific amount of work for around the district for people being evicted. See, people couldn't afford to pay it, didn't have the money. What happened was that you got your dole which was seven and six (7 shillings and sixpence) a week and you get thirteen loaves of bread for the fortnight. You'd have to go down to 7 Circular Quay, pick up thirteen loaves of bread and that had to last you the two weeks. And then you'd go to the Benevolent Society in Thomas Street and you'd get bacon bones or that; that may give you the soup or whatever you could make of them. And you'd get the dole at St George's Hall, St Georges Dance Hall, which is just down in King Street there, and the people there, quite a lot of people on the dole. And not only was it hard but sometimes you got two weeks in five work, relief work, and you used to have to go to Concord where they had the swamps out there and you dug and made the walls and stopped the swampland from coming in.

SR: Were you working? You were about fifteen when you came to Newtown, weren't you?

FA: Yes, around there.

SR: And were you working then?

FA: No, I wasn't working; it was very hard to get a job. I got a job at seventeen, I got a job in Annandale, working for a factory what made door hinges and locks and also nickel, did a lot of nickel plating. Once you turned eighteen they put you off because they had to bring your wages up so you never told them when your birthday was, you kept being seventeen. I kept being seventeen for about fifteen, sixteen months but as soon as you told them you had to get a rise in

your money – the biggest pay there up to twenty years of age at that time was twelve and six [twelve shillings and sixpence] a week.

SR: What brought your parents to Newtown? You said that they were in the country.

FA: Yes. Well, what happened was that my mother, she lost her husband in WWI – that's my father – and she had meningitis and typhoid fever and she lost her memory and in 1920 the Repatriation Department in England sent her out to Australia to recuperate and while she was out here she married, she married out here, and I came out five years later. I came out in 1925 and they were living in the country up at Portland and my grandmother brought me out here and, of course, she could always come back to England but she never left me, she wouldn't leave me with my mother because she's reared me from the day I was born, from when I was born in 1915 to up to when they brought me out here to ten years of age and she wouldn't leave me. So we stuck together for quite a number of years. In fact, she was ninety four when she died.

6.01 **SR: And when she came out she lived with you?**

FA: Actually, she was my mother, my father and everything else. A very strict Irish woman she was and a good woman and she could have gone back to her own sons in England but she didn't go back.

SR: And so you and your grandmother and your mother and your stepfather, I guess.

FA: Yes, stepfather. But, as I say, for a few months we broke up and we went to live in Camperdown and then in 1935 I've met my wife now and we got married in 1937. I got my first job at Austral Bronze, Alexandria here, and my first week's wages was three pound five a week [three pounds and five shillings].

SR: That's quite low.

FA: That was a man's wage. I was twenty one years of age when I got married.

SR: And you know when your parents left Portland and came out to Sydney - - -

FA: Yes. We had to leave Portland because what happened the Depression had set in and we had to sell the house - they sold it for twenty five pounds - we couldn't afford to keep it and the stepfather

and that came down looking for work; came to Sydney looking for work.

SR: And did he find work?

FA: He got work, yes. He got a couple of jobs and he ended up getting a job at the Austral Bronze. That's how I came to get in it at the same time.

SR: And did your mother work?

7.56 FA: No, my mother never worked, no. No, she wasn't quite strong enough to do it. Well, she was strong enough; she had a family, she had a family to look after. See, I've got three stepbrothers so she had a family to look after. But I never classed as – it was always with me grandmother and we had to leave because I was getting the pension of ten shilling a week from the Repatriation in England with my father being killed at Gallipoli and that was going on and you could only get so much dole, see, because if any money was coming it was taken off on your dole.

SR: So you and your grandmother moved out?

FA: So we moved out. And my grandmother, she ended up getting the invalid pension but things got a little bit better after that. But when you look at today and you think back on them days when you could leave your door open and go to sleep and never worry but that's how things have changed in society today. They talk about this being a rough area, Erskineville, Newtown and Camperdown and, sure, we had gangs. There was the Forty Thieves in Glebe always in trouble, always fighting, but they were fighting other gangs amongst themselves mostly. And then we had two big detectives used to travel here in Newtown. One was known as 'Long Tack Sam' and the other one was known as the 'Conga-Gorilla' – that was Jack Eyres.

SR: Kong Gorilla?

FA: Yes, Conga-Gorilla, that was his name. He was a big man and would have been about eighteen, nineteen stone but Long Tack Sam was six foot two and about as wide as that (demonstrates visually) but he used to do all the running and chasing to catch.

10.08 But he would, when you was on the street at nighttime, when you used to come up, you'd be looking in the shop window and around about a little after eight o'clock, he'd come and say, "Hey, about time you got home. Now, if you're here when I come back you'll get a boot in the tail" he said and ……. ……. …….. and we used to scoot off

because he would and you'd get a boot in the tail, there was no risk about that but it did more good than it ever did harm.

SR: When you were fifteen, were you considered by your family as to be virtually an adult, or were you still treated as a child?

FA: No, virtually as an adult at fifteen, at that stage of life there, because what little jobs you could do or get away with, try and do a bit on the milk run or a get the paper – in fact, one part of it, we used to get the horse and carts from Kind's [?] in Australia Street [Camperdown] and buy the speck fruit down the markets what we can afford and then go and sell them along the streets. And then the police used to chase you because the Italian fruit shops in Newtown used to ring them up and say, "Get them off the street. They're ruining my business". And, of course, what they'd do, they'd ring you up and they'd say, "Righto. Be in Newtown at two minutes to twelve", put you in the cell. At one minute past twelve you were out.

SR: The police would?

FA: Yes.

SR: Really?

FA: Yes. Well, they'd have to charge you.

SR: Because there'd been a complaint?

12.00 FA: Yes. And, of course, there'd be a twenty four hour sentence but no one ever give them the right name – in fact, they didn't want to know the right names, to be truthful, in them days; you're only back when you wasn't robbing anyone.

SR: You were just trying to make a bit of a living.

FA: Making a living. Anyhow, they put you in for a couple of minutes and then you'd be out ……. ……. …… What we used to do, we used to go to the dances in Newtown Town Hall and so when it got a couple of minutes to twelve we'd shoot into the police station in Australia Street.

SR: Hand yourself in?

FA: Hand yourself in; in one door and out the other. But there was no harm and there was no robberies or anything like that. It was only a matter of once a complaint was compiled they had to charge you.

SR: Were most of the kids, like the fourteen, fifteen year olds, were they out, looking for work, like girls and boys?

FA: No. There was very little chance of getting much work them days.

SR: But because of your age they could pay you low.

FA: Yes, the wages was right low but, as I say, I started off at seven and six – that was me first wage – and, as I said, I wasn't going to put me hands up because once you passed eighteen it went up to twelve and six a week and then they used to put you off. And it was like that all the time: as soon as you had a birthday you were gone.

SR: Well, how else did you earn a quid? When living with your grandmother, you had your ten shillings' pension but that wouldn't be enough for two people to live on and pay rent.

FA: Well, it was enough.

SR: Was it?

FA: In this respect it was enough. With our rent in English Street, Camperdown when I lived with my grandmother was seven and six a week.

14.00 **SR: So that left you two and six.**

FA: Yes, and then my grandmother had a pension which was twelve and six. But you've got to remember that you could get half a sheep for two and six and your bread was fourpence a loaf and then your food was fairly cheap. Although you didn't have money, your food was fairly cheap just the same, vegetables were cheap. As I say, you got your bread if you went down to Circular Quay and picked your thirteen loaves of bread for the fortnight.

SR: But you had to have a ticket or a coupon to get that?

FA: Yes, you had to have coupons. You had to go to the St George's Hall and get the dole coupons. See, you were allowed so much and it all depends on what income came in and your family or how many was in the family. Your biggest problem most of them days was your rent. Gas was very cheap. It was all in the penny in the slot them days and, of course, it went for a good while, the penny in the slot in the gas went for quite a while. You could get about three or four hours out of the penny. You could cook a dinner easy for the penny in the slot.

SR: And what did people do for a good time, if they wanted to go out?

FA: Well, in them days what happened was that if there was going to be a little party everyone'd take a plate. Some would be a bit richer than the other and they'd buy a couple of bottles of beer or mostly a bottle of wine because wine was cheap.

16.00 A quart of wine was one and fourpence [one shilling and four pence]. Fourpenny dart they used to call it and you could get a glass of wine in a wine bar and it used to be known as the fourpenny dart and a quart of beer was one and eleven pence [one shilling and eleven pence]. And, of course, some what was working because there was always a few working around - - -

SR: But what about when you were fifteen?

FA: But there was lots of dances, there was a lot of dances in Newtown.

SR: And would you be able to do at say the age of fifteen?

FA: Yes. And the biggest charge of the lot was sixpence to get in with a thruppence [three pence] halftime and, of course, half the time half of us'd have to wait until halftime because that's all we'd have would be thruppence – or we used to call it 'trey' [slang] in the old days. And there was the Newtown Town Hall and there was St George's Hall, there was the Manchester, there was the Douglas Social Credit Hall and there was free picture shows there. There was the dance hall, the Prince of Wales and then there was Newtown Hub No.1, then there was the Hoyts up in King Street and then there was The Hub No. 2. And, of course, one of the best buildings ever built, the Majestic Theatre in Newtown – of course, that's been pulled down – that was the greatest picture show of all time.

SR: What made it so good?

FA: The acoustics made it so good because it was the only hall known where you didn't have to have a microphone; you could speak from the stage and have three stories. Three stories high was the Majestic and the acoustics were that good they didn't have to use a microphone.

18.01 **SR: And did they have plays there as well?**

FA: Yes, they used to have plays. Opera was there for years, all kinds of plays were there for years.

SR: And did you go to them?

FA: No. We went when it was the pictures – it was a picture show for a long time too. We used to go in them days a Saturday night because that's about the only time, even when I was married at thirty seven, thirty eight, thirty nine we could only afford to go out once a week because we had to buy furniture. We bought the furniture on time payment and clothes and that on cash and carry; you used to pay back one and six and two and six a week; same with your furniture. Of course, that was the only way you could get on; you couldn't afford to buy all furnished like they do today. They've all got fridges and motor cars and everything else and rush straight in; them days you couldn't do it.

SR: And when you were fifteen and it was in 1932, who were your friends in the area around that time?

FA: Well, quite a few friends. I went with quite a few boys to the gym. I used to knock around the Hordern's Gym; McQuillan's in Hordern [St?] because we only lived a few doors from them. We used to knock around in them places and the boys we used to knock around a lot at the dances. And most of the dances where we used to meet and talk - - -

SR: Well, what about during the week? None of you were working and you weren't at school so what did people do?

FA: You'd be out looking; you'd be going 'round looking for work.

SR: And scrounging speck fruit.

FA: You'd be scrounging. Yes, you'd go around looking for anything at all what you could do. That was the only way you could survive.

20.01 **SR: And how did your mother and her husband, your stepfather and their children, survive the Depression period?**

FA: Well, they survived it the same like everyone else. He got the dole and then he got – they used to get three weeks on and two weeks off working but the two weeks you was off you couldn't get the dole.

SR: Yes.

FA: The three weeks you worked and the two weeks it was like that had to do you until you started off again. But they'd get off jobs if they could, window cleaning, doing anything at all. In fact, I used to make lamps and if you see them in town today they're worth anything up to fifty and sixty dollars. But just I used to get these boards and get them turned at the wood turners and I'd get a frosted glass and I'd cut

a moon shape, put it in and then just put a globe behind them and a statue in the front and you'd sell it.

SR: You'd make them?

FA: Yes, we made it; I used to make them, because I used to do a little bit of wireless work. I went and taught myself wireless and I went and studied at the RCA in City Road and do a bit of wireless work. I did end up buying a wireless business in Newtown later on.

SR: When you say "wireless work", you were repairing them?

FA: Yes, repair, yes. But you did anything at all even to the time I can remember one time when we had a little bit of a scam going. I probably shouldn't tell you but the scam was that you'd get an electric light globe and you'd take it down and you'd polish it up and then you'd go up the street a bit further and you'd say, "I've got a globe here. It'll save you electricity. You can have it for thruppence and I'll take your old globe and I'll sell you this new globe for thruppence".

22.11 **SR: It was the same?**

FA: And you'd take it and you'd clean the other globe up and you'd go up the street. They was little things you did, you know, I suppose they were dishonest.

SR: You kept getting your thruppences.

FA: You might think thruppence is nothing today but it was a lot of money in them days. In fact I'll go back to when they had the first hamburger shop in Newtown and that was in Hattie's Arcade, and for fourpence you got a cup of coffee and hamburger for fourpence when they first came out.

SR: Was that in the '30s?

FA: Yes. And then on Newtown Bridge where there's a horse trough there – I think it's still there …… ……. …. – there used to be a horse and cart and a bloke by the name of Pies [?] used to be there and he used to sell pies and peas for thruppence to the crowds when they come either come out the pictures or come out from the dances. And then you had another character in Newtown was known as Peg Leg George and he used to carry ties, handkerchiefs, condoms, anything you like. And he used to come up and you'd be sitting down and he'd come up on the dance floor and he'd say, "You want a Merry Widow?", all these French letters he used sell. And the girls used to say, "What's this Merry Widow?" He wouldn't tell them.

SR: Well, he was pretty enterprising.

24.00 FA: Yes. Well, there was another character and he was an Indian too. He used to travel around in the city as well as Newtown and he'd sell socks, shoes, anything at all; he'd carry them all on his back. They did all kind of things in them days to make a living. But Peg Leg George, he was the funniest man of the lot we ever had in Newtown anyhow.

SR: Were there any crims in the area?

FA: Yes, oh, yes, there was there but, look, to be truthful there were plenty here, without mentioning names going back a long way because people know who they are because there's still some of them there but they fought amongst themselves; they didn't fight anyone. Did a bit of robbery, but not much. They mostly picked the places they robbed; they knew if they were going to rob somebody they were going to get something; half the time they wouldn't come to the place where there was nothing. And, as I said, you could leave that door open or even when we lived in Ashmore Street when we was first married and Victoria Street on a summer's night you'd leave the door open to get a bit of breeze, you'd leave it open all night, and never worry you. You'd go to bed and never worry but not today, you can't do that.

SR: When did it change?

FA: It changed after the war and one of the reasons why it changed – and they can say what they like – the big change came when they started to get into the drugs; that's been the downfall of most of them. They say alcohol but if you take the two, drugs and alcohol, it didn't cost that much to get drunk.

26.10 What, for fifteen or twenty dollars you could get carton of beer and be drunk, but you go for drugs if they wanted a shot they're charging two hundred and three hundred dollars a shot.

SR: But was that in the '60s?

FA: No, it was after the Vietnam War - - -

SR: The Vietnam War?

FA: - - - when they came, a lot of the drugs came into this country. There was a bit of it during WWII but it was amongst the soldiers, not so much in the civilians I don't think, it was mostly amongst the soldiers. One part there in 1942, '43, I was working, I was in the Yankee

hospital at Herne Bay, I started pushing a bulldozer up in Queensland, getting the stores through, and I damaged my kidney and they brought me back. I was supposed to go to AGH (Australian Government Hospital), 103 AGH Concord but they took me to 103 AGH Herne Bay and that was the American hospital there, which is Riverwood today – it was Herne Bay them days. And while I was there I seen quite a few of the soldiers there who were mostly on that betel nut – they used to chew a lot of that.

SR: Really?

FA: But drugs had just started to slowly come in with Herne. Of course, it became more fashionable when they woke up to marijuana and all this stuff what they're doing now. They woke up to it grows wild everywhere so they were having the time of their lives but then they jumped from that to the serious stuff and that's what went in.

28.21 And the unfortunate part about it, that them things came in and then there was a turnover and socialisation, I think, where it was more promising if you went out with a woman – I'm going back when the pill came in – and that opened everything up then because the woman wasn't frightened and the man wasn't frightened. If he knew the woman was on the pill he didn't worry and that opened the system up because whether you like it or not I go back to my days – and I'm not ashamed to say it – I went with my wife, what, two and a half, three years and there was no sex. We got married, obviously we had sex after we married but you know, a woman was very careful in them days. She had to be because the woman was outcast if she had a child in them days. Oh, it was a terrible thing. It didn't matter about the bloke; the woman, she copped the lot of it.

SR: And was there many unmarried mothers when you remember back in the '30s?

FA: No, there was no such thing. Well, they were all single parents but mostly they went to the Salvation Army or the convents there at St Peters, out here at Tempe and them places, they had the child and most of them either went to homes.

30.04 **SR: They were adopted.**

FA: Adopted homes and all that.

SR: People didn't keep children. Did you know anyone that kept a baby?

FA: I know a couple of them there that wouldn't leave the kiddies. They had to drift away; they had to go away from the areas to survive just the same. See, as I say, you had to be very careful. Well, a woman there, every man used to say, "Well, I'm going to marry a woman who'll be a maiden" and all this, a virgin and all this thing and, of course, everything's changed after the pill came in and I was just thinking I think they'll be foolish today if they didn't try before they buy. And that's my honest opinion because if you wasn't suited to one another - - - [break in recording] I've been lucky, I've brought my family up and I've got two girls and I've got seven grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

SR: And where do they live?

FA: One lives at Revesby and the other one lives at Raby at Minto there.

SR: And they didn't stay around the area?

FA: They were brought up in the area, they were brought up here and they both married boys from Erskineville in fact. But they married good boys and, of course, as I say, they have big families and my eldest daughter had three girls and they're all married and all got children.

32.00 **SR: So you're a great grandfather.**

FA: Oh, yes, I'm a great grandfather and then my youngest daughter, she's got four – she's got three boys and a girl – and she lives at Raby and they've got a beautiful home up there. He was in the army for twenty-odd years.

SR: Just going back say to the '30s, what can you remember about the Newtown shopping centre?

FA: The Newtown shopping centre was far different to what it is today.

SR: That's King Street we're talking about, isn't it?

FA: Yes.

SR: What was that like?

FA: Well, King Street was really good. You had Woolworths – nothing over two and six.

SR: Really?

FA: Yes. And then one of the best clothing stores was Brennan's.

SR: Did most people shop in the area?

FA: All the people shopped in the area, yes, yes.

SR: Did people go in the city much at all to do any shopping?

FA: No, they didn't go into the city to do their shopping because they had everything here at Newtown. They had the fruit shops, they had the clothing shops; there was very good clothing shops here.

SR: And did most people in the area work locally?

FA: Yes, a lot of them worked locally, yes, because this was the area around here where there was a lot of work at times. You had Metters here with three thousand working in the early days just across the road here and it was all heavy industry around here and, of course, on the other side of the road here you had Alexandria goods yards where all the goods from all the country areas came in and unloading and loading.

SR: Bet you a few things fell off the trucks there. Did a few things fall off the railway trucks as that was the goods yard?

34.03 FA: Oh, most probably that went on. There was no doubt about that, plenty of times. You're talking to an old truck driver now that I've been fifty years.

SR: You were driving trucks?

FA: Yes.

SR: Who did you work for?

FA: I started off working for the Tigers and Slaves – it was known then as AT&SA – and they had their garage in Gibson Street, Camperdown. I'm going back to '36 and you used to sit on the sidewalk and you'd get a couple of hours, you may get half a day or a day's work casual and then it was ……. ……. you'd get another day casual there and then I worked for them for twelve months straight. And then I went from there. We joined the CCC [Civil Constructional Corps] and I had to go for a test to drive a bulldozer.

SR: What's the CCC?

FA: Commonwealth – just only remember a bit - it was part of the war effort. I could tell you better another name for it but I'm not going to mention it.

SR: You probably should.

FA: No.

SR: Block your ears.

FA: And we went to learn to drive a bulldozer and I had a licence to drive because those days you only had to have a car licence …… for a truck or anything at all and, of course, that changed as the years went on.

36.07 **SR: I keep going back to your early days when you first came to Newtown. Do you think it was a good place for kids to grow up?**

FA: Yes. I think all these places were good places for kids to grow up for the simple reason that there was more discipline in the homes than what there is today.

SR: There's more discipline?

FA: M'mm. If you were told you had to stay in or you played up you stayed home; that was it. And, of course, not having much money, tuppence and thruppence on a weekend was pretty good for kiddies or anybody; sixpence and you were a millionaire. And that was the biggest thing you could do was to stop them from going out. See, you only paid tuppence to go to the pictures when you were a kiddie in Newtown in them days.

SR: And that'd be the same as like thirty three dollars now because it costs about eleven dollars to go into the movies. No, for a child it'd be about six dollars to go into the movies now, isn't it?

FA: If I remember rightly, went at nighttime, we paid one and six to go up on the ……., the best seats in the house. As I say, pictures were cheap, so was the dances were cheap. Of course, we used to dance nearly seven days a week.

SR: Really?

FA: In the early days, yes. Oh, well, we used to love dancing, see because we had such a lot of places to go to: the original, the Red Mill, or if we were down in City Road and that became known as the Surreyville and from there you could go to the Albert Palais in Leichhardt on Parramatta Road or you could go to the Strollers at Marrickville Town Hall. And then there was the St George's Hall, Manchester, Newtown Town Hall, Douglas Social Credit Hall, …… …….. See, there was so many places you could go.

38.19 **SR: And would all ages of people be at these dances?**

FA: All kind of ages, yes, from the young to the old.

SR: And would they generally have a supper at halftime?

FA: No, no, never any suppers there, no.

SR: So there was no food or drink there at all?

FA: No, no.

SR: You couldn't buy it?

FA: No, no.

SR: Just dance?

FA: You could buy a milkshake. There was generally always a milk bar. Wherever the dance hall and the shop there was always generally a milk bar. See, the milk bars were the most favourite spots of the lot; that's where we all used to congregate, around the milk bars. And that's where you made, what will I say, you had your days, you had your good nights there and you talked to the blokes and you'd say what you did through the day. And then there'd be someone to put a fight on or something or a gang down the road; "All right, we'll go down and have a crack at that".

SR: Were you ever part of the gang?

FA: Yes, I was part of a gang, the Waratahs, Camperdown.

SR: They were called the Waratahs?

FA: Yes.

SR: And what did you do to become a member of the gang?

FA: You're just in and out; it was no big deal if you knew a couple of the mates.

SR: And how old were you to join, how old were people in the gangs?

FA: They run from about fourteen or eighteen, nineteen.

SR: Did you have to do anything violent?

FA: No, no, no. You got in fights amongst yourselves, sometimes they got in fights over girls – it was mostly girls to be truthful that you got in fights over – and there were no robberies or anything like that.

40.04 **SR: Did you fight with gangs from other areas?**

FA: Yes, oh, yes. Yes, there was a gang in the Newtown area, there was a gang at Enmore and there was one in Erskineville.

SR: What was the Erskineville gang called?

FA: To be truthful I forgot what they called themselves now but I used to fall in a trap now and again because I used to come down 'round my wife. My father had a shop there in corner of Victoria Street and Pleasant Avenue and I used to have to come down from Camperdown because I'd run into the bad territory down there.

SR: Because you weren't supposed to go over into other territory?

FA: Yes. I was taking another girl, I suppose, away from the gang, from their area.

SR: What'd they do, just beat you up or something or tell you to get out?

FA: We'd argue the point or one got a black eye or both of us have got black eyes or something like that. They used to say, "What happened to you?" "Oh, I run into a lamppost". But I don't know what's going to happen in a few more years the way things are going. I hope it gets better and not worse.

SR: Yes, so do I.

FA: I've had a good life; I've had a good life here. I've got a good family and I'm proud of it that I never had to once hit my girls in all the years from whenever they were born, never had to lay a hand on them.

SR: Gee, that's good.

FA: And strange enough it's passed on to the rest of the family. The boys they've grown up with them married and they've all got good families. So, as I say, a real family that sticks together, they're all right. I don't know what's happening today but I still say you've got to blame the government for some of it because when they took the discipline out of the schools I think that was the beginning of the end of a lot of it.

42.24 I remember when I used to go to school, and I did often, I never told me grandmother because I'd get another six. She'd say if I got six for being bad you'd get six off her too.

SR: I believe that later on you became very politically active, did you?

FA: Yes, I was very politically active. I've been in the Transport Workers Union. I was twenty one years on the branch committee and management of the Transport Workers Union. I've now received a Life Membership which they're going to present me next month. I got a presentation from the Trade and Labor Council. There's one on the wall in there. I got one from the Transport Workers Union of merit.

SR: And what made you get involved?

FA: Well, I'll tell you what made me be involved. When I started getting bits of jobs, me first job was working for Spurways – I was twenty – Spurways conned you and he used to get up on the roof and look down through the skylight to see if you were working or you went to the toilet, to see if you was having a cigarette. And then I got caught up with the union movement there and then when I left there I went to the Austral Bronze. And when I got to the Austral Bronze when I was twenty one I became very active and going for a lot of the claims for more wages and shoes because you used to burn your shoes out; about once every two weeks you'd have to buy a pair of shoes there and I became very active there.

44.15 We went to the courts and we give evidence them days which was pretty hard because you were up against solicitors and barristers them days which the union movement in them days didn't have any barrister. They only had advocates, just ordinary workers relying on just to give evidence and, of course as you know, solicitors or a barrister can twist words 'round any way they like. And they used to get away with it until the union movement was forced then to start to put barristers in. When I go back to 1939 I went in, we got a wage rise and we got seven and six a fortnight for boots because a pair of boots was worth only five and you could get a pair of boots for five and six them days, working boots. But going back then when I think of it, it just shows you how hard it was. I'll tell you a little story and I'm not going to mention the judge's name or anyone like that. But while I was before the commissioner – he was a judge them days, they didn't have commissioners – the solicitor was bouncing me one about "Oh, anyone could come and do the job". What I was doing was heaving over hot metal over these big rollers. He said, "They could get anyone on that". I said, "That's right, all bar you" and he said, "Why me?" I said, "Well, you wouldn't be silly enough to do it", I said, "You've got brains, haven't you?" And, of course, the judge wasn't very happy with me replying; he rebuked me a little bit.

46.01 So when the lunch hour came, we were having a bit of lunch and the judge was there and he said, "You can talk through me now.

Everything's off record". And he turned to me and he says, "What do you think of British justice?" I says, "There's nothing wrong with the British justice, only the bastard what administrate it".

SR: The only what?

FA: Only the bastards what administrate it. And course he came back, he said, "If you'd have said that in my court", he said, "I would have given you contempt of court, put me in for the rest of your life". But the fact was there it was true. There was nothing wrong with the British justice, it's only how it's administrated. Needless to say, they wouldn't let me get back on the stand again.

SR: Yes, they say it's off the record and it's not.

FA: Yes. But, as I say, I've done a lot in the union movement when you come to think of it. Well, I think of it and my wife and it was two nights a week for all them years I was in the union. You used to have one night for signing the cheques and pays and then there'd be another night'd be for the executive and then once a month'd be branch committee and management and then there'd be bits of little strikes you'd have and you'd have to go into that. But I've been fortunate.

SR: O.K. Thanks very much for your time, that's good.

FA: You're welcome, love.

SR: Is there anything else you wanted to say that we haven't - - -

FA: No, no.

Interview ends