ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Richard Mewjork (First of two interviews)

INTERVIEWER: Margo Beasley

PLACE: Town Hall House, Kent St, Sydney

DATE: 12 September 2011

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **MB:** **This is an interview with Richard Mewjork. It's taking place in Town Hall House in Sydney. The date is the 12th of September 2011. My name's Margo Beasley and the project is the Precincts Project which is being conducted on behalf of the City of Sydney's Oral History Programme.**

Richard, would you mind telling me where and when you were born?

RM: Yes. I was born in 116C Reservoir Street Surry Hills, ******** 1929.

MB: **So you were born at home?**

RM: Yes. It happened often.

MB: **Yes, I know it did although I think in the '20s things were starting to change.**

RM: Yes.

MB: **So were you delivered by a midwife, do you know?**

RM: Yes. Apparently there was a Nurse Bristow – her name appears on the birth certificate. I never, ever met her except once.

MB: **And you don't remember that time?**

RM: Not very well.

MB: What can you tell me about your parents?

RM: Well, Mum, my mother was born in Australia and she had a Chinese father and she had an English mother. If you'd like me to elaborate a little, I can.

MB: Yes, please do.

RM: Well, my mother was the daughter of – I don't remember her first name clearly but her second name had been Vaughan, V-a-u-g-h-a-n, who migrated to Australia and subsequently married my - - -

2.24 **MB: Your grandfather.**

RM: - - - my grandfather who was Charles Young – Young, Y-o-u-n-g.

MB: He was Chinese?

RM: He was full Chinese, yes, Charles Young. And my father apparently migrated from China, I believe Shanghai to Australia.

MB: And met your mother here?

RM: Met my mother. I cannot remember the gentleman because he left Mum with two young children and we never saw him later, no.

MB: And what was his name?

RM: His name was Mew Jork – that was his surname.

MB: One word?

RM: Yes, that is two words actually. However, there is some doubt as to whether or not the Jork part of the surname was correctly spelt. An old friend of the family who knew my father said the name should have been M-u-i, J-o-o-k, C-h-a-u, like three parts to the surname, Mui Jook Chau.

4.23 **MB: But your name is now a derivation of a kind of that, isn't it – it's Mewjork, one word?**

RM: Yes, I'm only relying on how it's written on my birth certificate, yes, that's it.

MB: So you've said you don't remember your father - - -

RM: No.

MB: - - - because you believe he abandoned your mother.

RM: He did totally.

MB: Do you know anything about the circumstances of that or anything about him – what sort of work did he do, for instance?

RM: Well, he had a business, apparently, in the Newcastle area because he was a hawker and he apparently had his business with poor people in the Newcastle area, possibly around coalmines and he supplied them with the goods that he kept for sale. In those days it was looked for, more or less received the goods and you paid on a weekly basis when you had the money.

MB: So these would have been household goods?

RM: Yes, I'd say so, yes.

MB: And he may have been a hawker on foot?

RM: No, he did have a car, apparently. We were taken to Newcastle, apparently to live in that area but it was not for very long because I can't remember it at all but Mum said that we lived there whilst her husband carried on his business and then we apparently came back to Sydney. Maybe it was at that time that they separated, something like that, I'm not sure.

6.35 **MB: So tell me about your mother then who was obviously an important figure in your life.**

RM: Mum was, yes, she very, very much so was.

MB: Did she work?

RM: As I can recall, she had spent some of her growing up time working as a machinist in the company called Gadsdens, G-a-d-s-d-e-n-s, who manufactured tins, containers but also apparently they made up bags – I would say they would have been paper bags – to contain cement because Mum told us that they had a quota of these bags they had to sew in each day and it was a considerable number but there was also the staff to do that. The machinists were heavily occupied doing their work as I understand and they could meet their quota for the day if they worked very quickly and to do that apparently it was something that they took up by singing songs as a group which made the day more pleasant but they could also sew more quickly.

8.39 And she seemed to enjoy that part of her life and the sewing, when apparently she decided that she could make dresses, she could make clothing, particularly for ladies that wanted something more or less custom-made to suit their requirements. And I can remember going with Mum around shops in Oxford Street and Mum would have a little book and pencil

and she would sketch the designs of the dresses being on the models in the shop windows, I can remember that quite clearly.

MB: And she'd then be able to replicate them for her customers?

RM: Yes, yes, she could offer that particular design for customers that wanted something a little nicer. But they brought in – Mum had pattern books and often I could remember the prospective clients looking through the books that Mum had, patterns, of the different dresses and I can remember her and the client going through the patterns.

10.15 And whilst I was only quite small I can well remember the sewing machine that Mum used with no electricity, of course, it was all treadle and I could remember I was often called to put the belt on the wheel underneath the machine when it came off or if it broke I had to put another belt on the sewing machine, an old Singer.

MB: That was a useful job for a little boy to do.

RM: Oh, yes, I could get in the little space underneath the sewing machine.

MB: So do you recall what kind of women were your mother's customers?

RM: I can well remember one of the more, if you like, prominent customers was Mrs Brown who was a schoolteacher at, I believe, either Crown Street School or a nearby suburb but Mrs Brown was a frequent customer for Mum and so much so that we even, I think, used to deliver her frocks or whatever it was to her house which was in the Darlinghurst area; I can well remember going to her house. And I also must have been friendly with her son because I can remember his name, which was Mattie or Matthew Brown.

12.03 So, often people that lived around us in Surry Hills would go to Mum because they may have had a difficult figure to buy off the shelf, so Mum would either alter or make the dresses for these particular customers.

MB: I just wanted to ask you before we move on. The factory where your mother worked, where was that situated?

RM: Gadsdens as far as I can recall was a big factory but it took up a block between Ann Street and Little Albion Street and it had quite a large, if you like, entrance for trucks to bring and take away material and the little street where that took place between Ann Street and Little Albion Street I can't remember its name, if it even had a name. But that's where the factory was, Gadsdens, and apparently it was a well-known company for making tin cans at the time.

MB: And your mother worked there before she had children or after or both?

RM: She was young, yes.

MB: She was young?

RM: She was a young person, yes, yes, yes.

MB: And she did the tailoring, obviously, after she had you children because it was work she could sustain from home?

RM: That's right, yes, yes. Now, there is a period of time that I can remember when Mum and apparently my father ran a shop, a milk bar, which I think I've included in that little book there.

14.15 **MB: In your memoir, yes.**

RM: Yes. And it was alongside a little laneway which separated that little shop from the Capitol Theatre and Mum worked in the shop, apparently, and outside in Campbell Street, the shop, there was a taxi rank and Mum was apparently quite a competent cook and she made cakes for some of the taxi drivers to take home. So they had what they wanted: apple tarts or sponge cakes or anything that Mum could make or offer them, yes.

MB: It sounds as though she was the kind of woman who could turn her hand to anything.

RM: She was. Mum was a good cook because when she was growing up her mother would ask Mum to make sponge cakes – that was a favourite of her mother's – and she learnt probably trial and error to cook for her mother and as kids growing up Jill and I were given the job of beating up eggs and sugar – I can remember that – making cakes and sometimes even given lots of little jobs like shelling peas or cutting up potatoes or peeling potatoes. So from an early stage we learnt, if you like, the basics of cooking through Mum.

16.19 **MB: I don't think you told me your mother's first name.**

RM: Her first name was Linda and her middle name was Linda Ruby.

MB: So her maiden name was Young?

RM: Her maiden name would have been Young, yes, yes, yes, yes.

MB: Now, your father was Chinese and she was half Chinese.

RM: Yes, yes.

MB: You don't really remember your father but I'm just wondering whether in the household would you and your sister have seen yourselves as

Chinese? Did you see yourselves as Chinese, did you identify as part of the Chinese community?

RM: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely. Living in Surry Hills which is very, if you like, cosmopolitan, if you like, the neighbours around us would have been Greek, Maltese, Italian, certainly Chinese and not a great number of Australians, white Australians, but there were quite a lot of, if you like, people like ourselves, Chinese, Greeks, Italians, Maltese and possibly other nationalities which I can't recall, yes.

18.05 I can't remember too many people from Africa or India and yet I think that they would have lived around us but certainly Chinese were very predominant in Surry Hills where we lived, yes.

MB: So there were other Chinese children around the place that you might have played with?

RM: Oh yes, oh, yes, yes. Yes, we were only talking yesterday, my sister and I, about the family called Hing, H-i-n-g, because one of the sons of a grocer, Jack Hing, who had his business in Reservoir Street, he had at least three sons, one of whom became a doctor. He was a very clever student at Crown Street School, he's now Dr Norman Hing, quite senior these days – I believe he's ninety four – and he's very clear about his background, the clients and patients he's had over the years and still remembers us as a family to this day. So there were the Hings. The sons were Norman, who became a doctor, Albert, who became a chemist, and I've just forgotten the first one who was more or less a school friend at Crown Street School.

20.15 But there were quite a lot of Chinese who moved away from Surry Hills as they become more prosperous. Surry Hills was a good place to live but if you wanted to live better you moved out to other suburbs, like Maroubra was very popular as I recall, or going over to North Sydney and so more or less you only stayed in Surry Hills when it was convenient because it was cheap living and you were close to, if you like, the shops, the businesses that provided you with what you needed for everyday living at a cheaper price, yes.

MB: So you think that people actually perceived it as just a temporary place where they would move onto something better when the opportunity arose?

RM: If you could improve yourself by moving out of Surry Hills, certainly you made your life to suit yourself and certainly if you were happy with your lifestyle and your friends and people that lived around you, why move? But then there were others who could see that their life would improve by moving away from Surry Hills and perhaps enjoying a better lifestyle with better housing.

22.17 Surry Hills, the homes were very, very basic and if you lived in one of those poorer type homes there were various sort of factors that made it something that you would rather move away from. It was not uncommon to have buildings that were in a bad state of disrepair or repair and so it was sometimes something that forced you to move from one house to another because of the condition of the dwelling. And there were various problems with leaking roofs, windows that either allowed the weather in, rattled, there were floorboards that rotted under your feet and in those days very little went on regarding upkeep to the standards that we see around us today. Rents were very, very cheap but compared to what was earnt, what money was available, it was on par with what you could afford, yes.

24.05 **MB: Tell me a bit about what it was like to be a child in Surry Hills then. I know you've mentioned you went to Crown Street Public School and your sister did as well, I presume?**

RM: She did, yes.

MB: Was she older or younger than you?

RM: No, I'm thirteen months older than her.

MB: And her name is Jill?

RM: Jill. Nancy Jill.

MB: But known as Jill, is she – you call her Jill?

RM: Jill, yes, Jill, yes.

MB: Just tell me what it was like to be a child in Surry Hills then.

RM: Well, growing up in Surry Hills was something that more or less you took for granted. Certainly from quite a young age, as I recall, I spent quite a bit of time, spending my time in a dark alleyway. It was actually a goods entrance between the shop that my mother and father had, a milk bar, and the Capitol Theatre and whilst they were busy in the shop I was put in the goods entrance and apparently told to stay there and so I could spend some time wandering around the backs of businesses that were in that particular part of Campbell Street and Hay Street and just watching what was going on, keeping out of the way of any deliveries, of course, and standing at the entrance to the goods dock and watching what was happening out in Campbell Street.

26.06 **MB: What kinds of things did you see at the rear of those businesses? It must have been quite interesting for a little kid.**

RM: Well, certainly the passing parade of what was going on, people of course and vehicles, horse and carts in the Campbell Street area there, quite a lot of activity to look at. Not a great deal of activity in the delivery dock that I could recall but it was dark and I more or less was not scared.

MB: So it wasn't threatening?

RM: No, no. I was never, ever threatened while I was wandering around the goods dock, delivery area, never, and I guess when it was time to be taken out of the dock and go home or stay in the shop for a meal or something like that it was considered to be all right for me to be in the dock as more or less a play area, yes.

MB: So a bit like a backyard. And what was the shop like – can you remember much about that? You said it was a milk bar and your mother made cakes.

RM: It was a milk bar, yes, yes. I can remember that there was cubicles, not tables and chairs, down one side of the shop which appeared to me quite long at the time and there was a shop where – I never took much notice, actually, but there was probably places or trays or shelves that displayed what was available inside the shop what you could have but I was quite young at the time and I can't remember a great deal of detail at that time, yes.

28.17 **MB: But it sounds like it was more like a milk bar in the sense of providing food and refreshments of some kind rather than smallgoods.**

Oh yes. Yes, it was there for the, if you like, those people that were interested who may have been visiting the Capitol Theatre. Being a milk bar in those days, milk bars were quite popular. I think it was in a good position, that milk bar. I can't recall why it was we ever left it but apparently we moved on from there. I can remember it as being, especially in the kitchen area, quite busy; I can remember Mum being always fairly busy in the kitchen, yes.

MB: So a little bit later on then when you were no longer in that alleyway space beside the milk bar, when you were playing with other children in the area or adventuring – I mean, children like to roam around I think if they get the opportunity – did you do that kind of thing?

RM: Yes. In Surry Hills there were things that you got occupied with such as wandering around the factories where they put out their rubbish, their old boxes, anything that looked like would be useful to take home to Mum to start the copper up because there was wash days and there was bath days which occurred somewhere near the weekends but certainly scrap wood, probably cardboard, anything that would burn would be something that

Mum would need from time to time and we would get it from going 'round the local factories.

30.44 And as far as playing with other children, certainly there was a certain amount of that. Growing up I used to enjoy playing with a friend who lived in a nearby street. I've just forgotten the name of the street now but we somehow obtained a billy-cart and we enjoyed coming down the hills in the nearby street from Samuel Street and at one stage we came down the hill, which was rather a long, steep hill in Ann Street, around from Riley Street that we would start getting into the billy-cart and we would go down Ann Street as far as the billy-cart would take us and then we might repeat that. But riding a billy-cart was something that as a kid we looked forward to.

There were plenty of, if you like, people and other objects and animals that were very interesting. There were in the Surry Hills area between Smith Street – at least between Samuel Street and Campbell Street - there were stables and some of the stables there were draught horses and in others there were trotters. I remember a chap in Goodchap Street who had rather a nice stable area and he kept horses there who were trotters and the draught horses that were used frequently, every day, were in another paddock in another stable off Campbell Street, just about opposite the end of Samuel Street, I can remember those stables.

MB: Where did the trotters race, do you know?

RM: I don't know for sure but as you would know there were places like – there was certainly Harold Park but there was a racecourse which I worked very close to, alongside it in fact, in Zetland called Victoria Park which is part of a big development, I think, today along Flinders Street Darlinghurst, down that way.

34.05 And there was also a racecourse that's no longer there – it's part of the University of New South Wales – and it was on the Anzac Parade facing Anzac Parade but it extended as far as Barker Street, I think it was, Barker Street, and the other street which was alongside Randwick Racecourse and the stables there. So there was two racecourses that are no longer there. The one at Kingsford, as I mentioned, just mentioned, and the one at Zetland which of course is no longer there, yes.

MB: So when you talk about animals you've talked about horses. I wonder if you were thinking about any other kinds of animals as well around the area. There must have been, I assume, domestic cats and dogs.

RM: Oh yes. Yes, cats were very common. We never had a pet, not even a cat for some reason. Maybe Mum didn't like them or they might have been a bit of a nuisance or keeping them might have been a bit too much trouble because she was generally pretty busy. But some people had pets, no doubt, but I can't remember them being common, not common, no.

36.02 **MB: No. Were there any other kinds of working animals in the area apart from the draught horses?**

RM: Well only those that we would see from time to time because the baker, Gartrell White's, had a horse and cart that brought around the bread and the milkman had a horse and cart with a milk tank on the back – I can remember that – and also there was another horse and cart delivery of rabbits. If you wanted a rabbit to buy for dinner you could buy it off this particular carrier. So there was a fisherman that used to come 'round, particularly on Friday mornings and just on daybreak you might hear "Fisho, fisho" and if we had the money, of course, Mum'd send me down with some money because you could buy enough fish for breakfast and you might say about thruppence each and that would be something to look forward to, a bit of steamed fish on Friday morning.

MB: Fish on Fridays, of course, was because Catholics ate fish on Fridays but a lot of people, for convenience other people also ate fish because that was the day it became available.

RM: Yes, yes.

MB: And what religion was your family – did they have a religion?

RM: Yes, C of E [Church of England].

MB: C of E, O.K.

RM: C of E, yes, yes.

MB: And your mother's cooking, was it European predominantly, what we would call English cooking?

38.01 RM: Oh no. Because her Dad was Chinese and of course he liked cooking, Mum used to probably watch and help cut up things if he needed it and so basically her cooking was a mixture of Chinese, Cantonese Chinese cooking and because her mother was English she was taught to make the type of English dishes that she had enjoyed and certainly when time's permitted and money permitted Mum would have a Sunday roast and it was a time when she would make pasties. We always had interesting, tasty food from Mum.

MB: Sounds good, I must say.

RM: Yes. We really enjoyed Mum's cooking, yes, yes.

MB: Now, your mother kept the family together mainly by the tailoring work that she did.

RM: Yes.

MB: But she also subsequently re-partnered, as we would say these days?

RM: Well, George Singh came into her life and I was probably – I've got some times here to give me a bit of a reminder. These are ages when I did things because I ……. ……..

MB: O.K. You've got some notes here.

40.04 RM: Yes. And I can remember George Singh and I've got photos of George at home.

MB: So he came into your lives about when, do you think? You must have been still fairly young, were you?

RM: Well, I was a schoolkid, yes, I was a schoolkid.

MB: So probably still in primary school, do you think, or maybe just gone to high school?

RM: Well, I was only talking to Jill yesterday and she said that she could remember George, our stepfather, taking her to the markets and she was only a little thing and he'd sit her on a stack of potatoes, just to be a bit of an outing for her, and people that used to either talk to George because he had a stand in the old markets - which is now Paddy's – and when they saw her apparently she was a nice little kid - - -

MB: No doubt a cute little kid too.

RM: - - - and they'd give her a penny. And she was only saying this yesterday that sometimes she'd get a penny because she was just sitting there, behaving herself.

MB: And looking sweet.

RM: And looking quaint, yes, yes. Yes, she was like that.

MB: So George became your stepfather.

RM: He became our stepfather and he was very good to us. He more or less provided us with food, he certainly helped Mum in many ways, provided money because he had a business down in the markets, but I think as I mentioned that he always considered himself a battler.

42.15 **MB: So he was Chinese, George?**

RM: Oh yes, he was full Chinese. Oh yes, George was a full Chinese and his parents – just days ago I think one of the names was – but at least his father was quite a businessman. He looked very distinguished if I can remember rightly, a moustache; I think he might have even had a beard but he had a moustache. And I have some very nice photos of the family going back on George's side because he was in business and I won't say he was very wealthy but he was certainly above the normal sort of wage level. He had a factory which was going towards Moore Park and I can remember the factory. It could have been up the top of Foveaux Street, somewhere there, but it was a sizeable factory. I never, ever went inside but that's what George used to say, that his father had owned that factory when he was alive and made furniture.

MB: But George, you said, always considered himself a battler.

RM: A battler.

MB: Why would that be? Did they lose the factory?

RM: Well, at the time, of course, as the age and the time would tell us, that it was Depression times and it was hard to make, if you like, a good living.

44.02 Sure, you'd get by because there was a way in which George would bring us home vegetables but it would be because he'd go and see a mate, a couple of mates and get something from them to bring home and then they could come and see him and take some spuds or some pumpkin or onions or something and it was more or less a friendly arrangement but it was recognised because he was a businessman like you, but things were tough so if you could get some spuds to take home for the weekend without paying for them they just let George have, you know, a few apples or something like that, that's how it all went.

MB: Exchange, yes. So his business was in - - -

RM: The produce market.

MB: - - - the produce market, which was subsequently called Paddy's Market.

RM: Today it's called Paddy's but it used to be called the produce market but there was various parts of that market building where fruit would be sold in boxes that had come from the country, sent down. But George had a produce stall just inside one of the big doorways and he sold potatoes, onions and pumpkin which were fairly, more or less a staple requirement for a fruit shop, but the profit that you could ask for by selling it was not much and so if you made a small profit on the day you did O.K, you were happy with that, fairly contented with that.

46.05 **MB: So was that all he sold, those three vegetables, or did he sell other things as well?**

RM: No, that's all he sold, yes. He was a dependable, if you like, I think they called it – more or less he had this stand and he had his group of customers that could depend on George to make sure that they got potatoes, onions and pumpkin, that as far as George was concerned they were O.K, they were O.K. to sell because - - -

MB: They were reasonable quality, you mean?

RM: Well, he would empty the potatoes out and check them out for any bad potatoes, rotten potatoes, throw them out and then only put the good ones back in the bag and so if he sold a bag of potatoes he'd been through the potatoes that were in the bag; for the shopkeeper he was going to get something worthwhile.

MB: So he was always very reliable?

RM: Oh yes, yes.

MB: So his customers were primarily shopkeepers?

RM: They'd be shopkeepers, yes, yes.

MB: And where did he source his supplies from? George, I mean.

RM: Yes. Well, he had suppliers and I can remember one supplier used to bring his potatoes down from Bathurst and the name of that fellow that used to come down were the Shara brothers and I think they may have been Lebanese, the Sharas, yes. And they knew George well and at times they would have more potatoes than George could put on the stand or he'd want to leave on the stand and they would deliver the potatoes to his house in Smith Street and so you would have the front room full of bags of potatoes.

48.07 **MB: So this was a house where he lived or where you all lived?**

RM: Well, we lived there at I think it was number 10 Smith Street, yes, yes.

MB: And you've also told me on another occasion that you worked for George, or with George?

RM: Yes, that's right.

MB: He took you out of school sometimes - - -

RM: He did, yes.

MB: - - - and you'd help him with the stall. So can you give me a bit of a picture of that?

RM: Well, the building that became Paddy's Market it's no longer there, like the original Paddy's Market is no longer there but it was called – and I saw a photo of this last week at the library in Haymarket and it was called Produce something Markets, right, but that building is no longer there because it's been demolished and it's now the Sydney Entertainment Centre, right, but it used to be a markets there. Actually, George used to call it the Growers Market because you would get a lot of the – not that the potatoes and onions weren't grown by people like growers but you had more of a variety of the day to day vegetables. For example, you would get your lettuce, your fresh lettuce there when they were in season, there were things that grew seasonal and they would be sold over at the Paddy's Market at the time but you could also buy there, for example on Fridays when Paddy's Market was really a busy place you could get poultry, you could get cheap meals, you could get your flowers and it was more like Paddy's Market is today, right, except at Paddy's Market you can't buy live poultry.

50.14 **No.**

RM: No, not at all, right. But in those days it was quite the usual thing to buy a chook for the weekend and prepare it for the Sunday dinner or whatever and you could also – which was very popular with children – day old chicks and you could take them home and try and get them through their difficult time. You didn't always get them through but that was part of growing up, I suppose.

MB: So what did you do in the markets to help George?

RM: Well, George, he had some way of asking me – or not even asking me – more or less saying "I'm going to the markets tomorrow", and that's Friday, right, because George from his stand in the old markets or Paddy's Market as we know it today, he used to go over, he had a stand over in the produce market which was the original Paddy's Market. He had a stand over there and they called the stand just maybe about six to eight feet of a concrete bench and it just went from one end of the building to the other and you had so much which you rented from the council or the markets.

MB: So he just rented a space on that bench?

RM: Yes, just a space. And George would have like a wooden tray, a shallow wooden tray and he would take his hand truck – which we called a "hand truck" – he'd put a couple of bags of spuds on it, like one laying down, maybe one across the top of the bag, and he would wheel it from his stand here to go over there and there was a way in which "Oh, look after the stand" while he was away so that if a customer came you'd say "He'll be back soon" or something like that.

52.32 It was an arrangement to look after the shop while he was over on the other side, taking potatoes over. Mostly potatoes I can recall more than anything else, more than onions, more than pumpkin, but it was like you might say Friday night was like the end of the week, the working week for George and if he could reduce his amount of stock that was a good thing, right. And he used to charge, I can remember, ten pound of potatoes – we had a way of weighing them up – ten pound of potatoes for two shillings and that was considered to be a fair price to get your customers but if things were a bit slow he would increase the amount of potatoes for the two shillings. And I can well remember that we would sell potatoes, twenty pounds of potatoes for two shillings and you'd have two bags like that (demonstrates visually).

MB: Big sacks.

RM: Yes.

MB: And about how old would you have been at this time?

RM: Well, I was certainly a schoolboy. Probably – yes, I can remember I was at Crown Street School because there was a bit of a worry, of course, that by missing school that the truant inspector would be looking to nab your parents.

54.38 So I used to sort of be told sort of "Go over there, get out the way", because apparently they did make raids on the kids that used to work in the markets and they'd try and, if you like, enforce their particular rules on the people that were in charge of the kids at the time. But the truant inspector was a bit of a worry for Mum and George.

MB: So there were quite a lot of children in the markets, do you recall?

RM: Well, there was a smattering of them, not that I took much notice of them because I had my little job to do, whatever it might be but at that age it was well known that if they caught kids down the markets the truant inspector would look for their parents to issue them with some sort of a notice, you know, get them back to school.

MB: And you think when you've been looking here – you've got a list of dates and so on here – you think that it was probably while you were still in primary school?

56.01 RM: Yes, in that area there.

MB: Up to the age of about eleven?

RM: Yes, yes, about then, yes.

MB: And how often would you have gone, do you know?

RM: Yes, up to the age of eleven because as I say here at age ten you're old. Mum at this stage, we'd moved from Surry Hills and we've moved over to Francis Street, just off College Street - it's called Darlinghurst – and Mum bought a little shop and she fitted it out, got it fitted out, and then I would work in the shop of a nighttime and when she got sick I actually used to take over the cooking because she was at home, she was sick.

MB: In Darlinghurst?

RM: In Darlinghurst, yes, yes, yes. So I was a ten year old, cooking for adults.

MB: So by this time you think you were no longer helping in the markets or you were doing that as well?

RM: Probably not, not helping in the markets, no, no.

MB: So you don't really remember how often you might have done that?

RM: No. Well, Mum was starting to get into business and she was doing very well because there was a lot of servicemen, not only our own boys but those from England and the Americans, of course, and the shop was probably within the city that the servicemen would be wandering around and they'd find the hamburger shop and it was to their liking. It was very popular; Mum did very well at the food shop.

MB: So you're talking about American servicemen here?

RM: A lot of Americans, yes, particularly Negros, and they used to more or less do more wandering around than the other boys, the more European Americans, but it was getting a good reputation amongst the servicemen. It was probably because it was within the area that servicemen wanted to frequent: that was down towards Palmer Street where there was, if you like, more attractions for them.

58.32 **MB: It was a bit of a red light district down there?**

RM: It was, it was, yes. Yes, well going down towards Palmer Street, that was well-known. But then we had, during the day of course, we had the nearby shops, the shops that sold clothing, particular ……. and Brash's which was right opposite where our shop was. We'd get the shop girls coming over and other people that were interested in the hamburgers and the grills and things like that that we were selling; the business did very well. From that Mum went and bought two shops in Paddington and then she bought a coffee lounge down in Hunter Street, so at one stage you might say she had three businesses running at one stage.

MB: Gee whiz. She was obviously a very competent and capable woman.

RM: Oh yes, yes.

MB: So the one we're talking about now, the Darlinghurst one, can you remember what it was called?

RM: I really can't. Maybe it just had "Hamburgers and Grills", something like that.

MB: And did she specifically tailor what she was making for the servicemen? I mean, were hamburgers and grills very widely - - -

RM: Yes.

MB: - - - available in Sydney before WWII, can you recall?

RM: Well, our nearest competition was right up on the corner of Oxford Street and Flinders Street and I think it was called the 'Sip and Bite' and it was very well-known amongst the people that lived in that area and also taxis – the taxis had a club along Flinders Street.

60.23 But it was a big shop and a very good shop for hamburgers and that sort of thing, very well-known, whereas Mum's little shop, sure, it was known to the locals but it would not have had the sort of reputation and recognition of the Sip and Bite which was up there in Darlinghurst, right up there not far from the courts, just across the road.

MB: Yes. Nevertheless, she obviously did very well with her smaller establishment.

RM: She did well. Yes, yes, she was ambitious, she was looking around to expand and she decided that she could sell the little shop there in Liverpool Street – that's where it was – and go to Paddington because Paddington in those days was where a lot of our soldiers were stationed, down at the old Showground, Sportsground, in the Moore Park area, and she apparently made a decision to buy into a shop there which was called the Regent Café and it was right opposite Regent Street which went down towards the Showground and the Sportsground where a lot of the soldiers were barracked and that sort of thing.

62.05 And so she started the Regent which was into hamburgers and grills. It had already been a café of some kind but Mum introduced the hamburgers. And it did very well so that she bought another café next to the Oxford Theatre, virtually right next to the Oxford Theatre, and that's where I came into it; I was getting old enough to run it.

MB: This in Oxford Street?

RM: Yes.

MB: In Oxford Street, yes.

RM: Yes, yes.

MB: You were getting old enough to run it. Yes, so how old were you by then, do you think?

RM: I've got it here. Here it is; about sixteen to seventeen, yes.

MB: So had you finished school by this stage, finished high school?

RM: Yes, definitely. Yes, I finished school when I was about fifteen because I got a job at the *Truth* and *Daily Mirror* – and what's that? – fifteen to sixteen, right.

MB: *The Truth* and the *Daily Mirror* being two very well-known then city newspapers.

RM: In those days, yes, yes, yes. Yes, they were in Kippax Street near the railway, yes.

MB: Kippax Street in Surry Hills.

RM: Yes, that's right.

MB: Yes, where News Limited still is.

RM: More than likely, yes, yes.

MB: Which I certainly owned the Daily Mirror.

RM: Yes.

MB: We're going to probably have to wind up fairly soon - - -

RM: All right, O.K.

MB: - - - and it would be quite nice if you could tell me a bit more about working on the Truth and the Daily Mirror. How did you come to be working there>

RM: I think I may have been looking in the newspapers for jobs that were available that I could do and I'm not sure whether a neighbour called out that they're looking for people over at the Truth and Daily Mirror – I didn't know them.

64.15 And anyway I found my way over to their business in Kippax Street and I saw a gentleman who was at, you might say, up the top of the stairs who

was more or less in reception, a Mr Wheeler, and he said that they had jobs available and they would be for young boys, young people, and they would become copy boys and he just briefly described what happened: "You sit here until someone calls out 'Copy' and 'Copy boy'" and you would go and see what they wanted. It was more like a message; sometimes we would to the canteen and get somebody some food that they wanted or other times they'd want some stationery or something like this or "Take this copy over to the news editors" and so you were more or less at their beck and call to help life, if you like, revolve around producing a newspaper. And I enjoyed it because there was interesting things to find, if you were sent on a particular message to pick up some more cut paper for their scribbling or their writing or their reporting. And I found that there's a lot more to a newspaper than buying it at the corner shop, because from the very next stage of producing a sheet of the paper the news had to be typed up into blocks which were set into a metal tray and the machine that actually printed the print for the news or the item which was to go in the newspaper was called a linotype machine.

66.33 And eventually what appears to be a sheet of paper, right, originally starts off being put together by the type coming from the linotype and placed into this particular tray and then once that is done a proof is made of that paper to see if there are any mistakes, anything needs correcting, and once it's approved, right, it goes to another process where a material which is like paper, thicker than paper, because it had asbestos in it, and they would press it under a great weight on top of the linotype, right, and then if that proved successful they checked it. Then it would be sent downstairs where molten lead or the type of material that had to be melted was run over this particular sheet of paper, asbestos, and the imprint which was then in the casting, if you like, was what was needed to be put onto the rollers of the presses, the newspaper presses, and each sheet would be bolted on and eventually in order for the paper to be, if you like, put outside for collection.

68.17 It would go through a very complicated process of being printed, being, if you like, separated and placed in the order in which the newspaper is put together and then eventually it's sent down to where the bundles of the papers were collected by the delivery people; very interesting.

MB: It would have been a very, very busy scene then, coming to collect the newspapers.

RM: Well, there would be lines of trucks outside, you know, utilities and that sort of thing, and big trucks too. But it was a very exciting type of, if you like, industry – I guess it still is today – and the amount of, if you like, work, worry, frustrations that different people went through to make sure that everything was right because you've got to remember that the printing has to be checked to make sure there's no mistakes in it. And there was a lot of responsibility on news editors, people who read the sheet of paper, each sheet of paper, and that checked figures and misprints and of course then if

there were mistakes there was a lot of, if you like, as bit of trouble here and there. And I can well remember the editor in chief - a little short, we used to call him "Mr Five by Five" – and he found that he wasn't happy with something, he would actually go into the linotype room where the linotyper's perhaps going to correct a problem and he would pick it up and just throw it across the floor and no one dared criticize him: he was the boss.

70.26 **MB: What was his name, Mr Five by Five?**

RM: It was like a Mr Mac something, I've just forgotten his name, but he was apparently very well respected because he wanted things to be done absolutely correctly.

MB: And when you said your job was as a copy boy, the word "copy" refers to what the journalists were actually writing, wasn't it, it's called "the copy", that is.

RM: Yes.

MB: And I think in fact in those days they used to type out multiple copies on small pieces of paper on their typewriters.

RM: Yes, yes.

MB: Is that correct? They'd have several layers of carbon paper, I think.

RM: Yes. I know that we had a table where like from the handwritten piece of material or report, that would go up to the table at the very end of the room where the girls sat and they had headphones, they had typewriters and they would type up whatever they had to so that it could then go to the next stage where it would be taken to say the news editors or some particular person who was responsible for seeing that actually going into the newspaper, right.

72.04 And it certainly was a trying and exacting, if you like, process, getting the written word into type and being ready to be put into the news editors for correction or for accepting. And then it would be, the next process of course would be for the linotypers to actually do the prints, you know, the little plates of words, and they would set it out on a tray as big as a newspaper. And then once they've printed that off it had to be checked and then if that was O.K. the next step was to put that mixture of paper and asbestos over the top and press it down very hard under a lot of pressure and then they would pour molten metal over it, right, which would be then put in apparently on the shape and which they were bolted onto these presses, right, these drums that spun around and printed the paper off. So there was quite a lot of work involved in getting the written word onto the newspaper, quite a lot, yes.

MB: And were the copy boys treated well in general?

RM: Yes. Yes, we were at the beck and call of just about everybody in that room and if they wanted a message, if they wanted you to go up to the canteen and bring them down a sandwich or something like that, if they didn't want to do it themselves they'd just tell you to go up and "Bring me down a roast beef sandwich" or something like that, "Bring me down some cakes". In fact, the editor in chief, Mr Five by Five, because he apparently loved food because he was that way, you know, and sometimes we would find him upstairs at the canteen so that he himself ordered what he wanted but other times I can recall we would go up there and get something for him, yes, "Just go upstairs for Mr Mac" and we'd bring down whatever it was and sometimes we'd just give it to Mr Wheeler and he'd take it in, right.

74.39 **MB: There was a hierarchy there?**

RM: Yes, oh, there was, yes.

MB: You didn't stay in that world; you didn't stay working in newspapers, did you?

RM: Well, I moved into what they call almost a cadet reporting role which I was finding very interesting but for some reason or other – I'm not quite sure what happened after *The Truth* and *Daily Mirror* but I think Mum opened up another café and I moved away from the newspaper. It began to get a little bit, if you like, a bit more pressure on me when Earl Wilson, who was my senior person, on the days in which we visited the cattle and sheep sales.

MB: For the newspaper?

RM: And Earl, he was a bit hard to work for, inclined to be a bit of a – oh, what would you call it? – anyway, he'd show his superiority and he'd do a bit of pushing and push you and "Get over there to get that thing from so and so" and I wasn't at all happy about that; it made life a little bit sort of, not very pleasant.

76.04 So when Mum went and bought into a shop at Lakemba – and I'd been actually doing a little bit of work for a builder that Mum used to build a house at Earlwood, and I did a bit of work for him; he was looking for some labour so I become a builder's labourer for him. And then I started to do a bit of work for an interior decorator, Stevenson and Derrett, and I learnt some very interesting, if you like, interior decorating work because Steve had actually been successful in getting the contract to completely do the State Theatre, all of that beautiful work in the theatre itself, right. He knew how to go about doing it and he had to employ people from Italy; they became his employees. He started a factory over in North Sydney area and a lot of the work that was installed in the State Theatre was done over there, right. So

he was a very clever person and I learnt with Steven and Ken Derrett interior decorating that today is more or less a lost art, yes, beautiful.

Interview ends