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OH 456/41

Full transcript of an interview with

RAY JAENSCH

on 8 October 1997

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

OH 456/41 **RAY JAENSCH**

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

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TAPE 1 - SIDE A

AUSTRALIAN RURAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interview with Ray Jaensch at Albert Park, South Australia, on 8th October, 1997.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Ray, where and when were you born?

RJ: I was born in 1936, 14th May, at Murray Bridge Hospital but I usually say born and bred at Callington.

So who were your parents?

RJ: My parents were Bill and Clara Jaensch. My mother was a Werner and had grown up just west of the town of Callington in the vicinity of the *(sounds like, A-Clare)* Mines and my Father had grown up - he was the eldest of a large family further down along the banks of the Murray at Hartley. Sorry, not along the Murray. The Bremer, I should say.

Down near that Salem(?) area?

RJ: That's right, yes.

Did you have brothers and sisters, Ray?

RJ: Yes. I have two older brothers and two older sisters. Yes, I was the youngest in the family.

What would your earliest memories be of that life around Callington?

RJ: The earliest memories - school days. I remember quite well my first day at school. Headmaster by the name of - oh, his name usually comes to me quickly. I'll come to that a little later. Harry Taylor followed - Alan Woods. I think he's still alive - Alan Woods. I'm not certain of that, but that would've been probably in '42.

And then I began trapping rabbits as a very young lad. Probably only about eight or nine years of age. Few old second-hand traps around the place. And then I'd buy a dozen new ones from time to time from the rabbit buyers, HH Bodley, who were in, as I remember it, 64 Wyatt Street, Adelaide. I think was the address on the truck. And they were rabbit buyers there. In fact, I ran into a fellow sometime back at a retirement village who had worked for them and used to skin the rabbits for them and what not.
So they would come up there each weekday, Monday to Friday, any time between sort of seven and eight in the morning, and you'd have your rabbits - I used to trap the area mainly down where the Mount Barker Creek runs into the Bremer. Couple of kilometres south of Callington. They would come through there. I'd have the rabbits hanging on the fence. Just used to gut them, and pair them. It was quite lucrative for a young kid, you know. War days there as I remember. They were probably seven/eight shillings a pair. By the time I was 15-1/2, I bought a near new 350 BSA motor cycle, spring frame, for which I paid £180. You know, which was a lot of money in those days.

So tell me about that trapping. A lot of children today know nothing about it because traps are prohibited. Or supposed to be.

RJ: Yes, that's right, they are.

How would you set your line of traps, Ray?

RJ: Well, I would head off down there on the push-bike with the rabbits in a sugar bag on the back, or on the bar of the bike, or wherever. Would set them out at the burrows. Sometimes at buck heaps, as we called them. You know, where the rabbits get out and you see where they normally defecate and so on. So set them out. And then it'd be an early rise in the morning if I'd set out a lot of - well, a lot for me as a boy. You know, two or three dozen traps. I would be off early in the morning. Probably half past five/six o'clock. Sometimes breakfast time you'd listen to the hill-billy half hour, whatever time that was on radio. Six or six thirty or something. All the old singers. Rogers, and Wilf Carter, and so on.
And head off down there. Go around the traps, take the rabbits out and put them in a bag. Carry them across to the Callington/Strathalbyn road, which has now been re-routed in that area running up to the junction bridge, as we

called it. And there's the new bridge there that was built probably in the early 50's. And I used to take the bike across the old one. The pillars still stand there in the Bremer, from the old bridge.
So then, there kill and gut the rabbits, bleed them and gut them, and pair them and wait for the Bodley's truck to come along. Sell the rabbits, and then on the push-bike back to Callington. That's also in a poem in the book there, 'Goin' round me traps', written in the vernacular, the language of the day. Deliberately drop the g's here and there. That tells a story. I mentioned Bodley's pick up in that poem, yeah.

And what was the home life like for you, Ray? Was it very much centred on the farm at the time?

RJ: No. I didn't grow up on a farm. Our little cottage still stands on the banks of the Bremer at Callington. As many cottages were at Callington, I believe built by the Cornish miners - the Cousin Jacks who had settled there. Course Callington has a lot of copper mines. In fact, there was 150th anniversary of the old town on the 26th of this month, and they paid me the honour of being Master of Ceremonies. On the day I think we're having the Federal Minister - oh, who's coming up there? Alexander Downer, he'll be there, and so on.
No, the little cottage still stands there. Very low doorways. Probably only, you know, sort of five foot six/five foot eight doorways.
And my Father, he just got work wherever he could. He was a labourer. Worked for the Councils, railways gangs. There was a time he was down at Islington and the gangs would only come home Friday night and go back Sunday night, or Monday morning on the train. But he worked grubbing onion weeds with the local Councils. Anything like that that was going really.
Yes, and my Mother also had a couple of house cows. There's another poem in the book. I'm not promoting this book here but it comes to mind. 'The Day I took Flossie to Mr Pake's(?) Bull', I think has probably engendered more comment than any other poem in the book because a lot of people relate to this. Chris Pake(?), who lived up on the old Princes Highway which runs north town of the town. Now the freeway passes on the south, but about a mile north of the town the old Princes Highway passes by and there used to be Vic Lehmann's garage there on the corner where the Strathalbyn road meets the Princes Highway. The old fuel depot still stands there. A concrete building.

Vic Lehmann, who ran the garage, was there in a little place, and next door to him was Chris Pake(?), and he had the local Red Poll herd and Red Poll bull, and at the appropriate time (the nicest way I can put it) I would drop the old cow down there and he'd put her into the bull, so to speak, and then he'd let her out in the afternoon. And I wrote a poem tongue-in-cheek, you know. It's quite humorous, relating to that venture.

So was local town life pretty lively in those days?

RJ: It was. The Bremer was a beautiful, clean creek. I've got photographs of it there the way it used to be. I can show you a couple of those after if they mean anything. In fact, a fellow's going to come down who's doing the display for the Callington 150th and wants to have a look at them.
But, yeah, that was a beautiful, clean creek. We would've spent, I would say, 90% of our childhood days, if we weren't at school or going around traps or whatever or ferreting, in the bed of the creek. Our house is right on the bank facing west towards Adelaide. My Grandparent's house was across the creek facing back towards us, facing east. And it was a beautiful, clean creek with clean gravel, clean sand, water birds. In fact, I'm sorry that it's been allowed to degenerate into somewhat of a stinking mess of reeds that come up from down the Mount Barker Creek way. Came up stream. I don't know what could've been done to have stopped it but I certainly wish it would've so the kids could enjoy the beautiful setting that we had in that creek.
Summertime we'd mess around down in the water. It just had very shallow water, a few inches deep. There was a time there we dammed it all off. There's a photograph of that there, and we had our own little swimming pool until we came home from school one lunch time and found our dam smashed. It was a dam like beavers would build, you know, to block off the flow. And all the cockies down the creek had wondered why their water supply was dwindling and they'd come up and found our dam and they got stuck into it with their shovels and smashed it, and our water was gone. But we had, you know, sand bags and sand. So, yes, the creek.
The other games we used to play under the bridge. I see it has the name Erskine Bridge on it now. I'd never heard of that in my childhood days. But that has a concrete base. They rebuilt it when I was probably only seven or eight years of age. Rebuilt and put a new concrete base down. I remember, at

those times, walking across boards when there was a flood in the creek. It was quite eerie going to a euchre meeting up at the hall, or whatever, walking across floodwaters. You know, on boards, and the water swirling along below. And that Bremer used to have some torrents in it, you know. In fact, it had one there of which I made a movie film. I went up and filmed it. Christmas about five years ago when we had those - lot of big rains.

That's quite right.

RJ: Yeah. About December 20th, or something.

Was it a strong local community though, Ray? Did you know most people?

RJ: You knew everyone. In fact, there's another poem in the book, 'When I go back to my home town'. And it's sad now when you go back, if you're in a contemplative mood and you stand there in the street and you look around, and they're all strangers. You know, you're a stranger in your old home town. And it is sad.
When I wrote that poem I mentioned - when I first wrote it I mentioned names of identities. And then when I went to publish it in the latest edition - the expanded edition - of my book, I didn't know whether to do that and use the names without checking up with the descendants and partners of the people, and I didn't have the time to go and do all that so I went and changed the names.
And I regret it because I would've - one fellow who was the most colourful character who'd every grown up in the town, a bloke by the name of Harry Spinks, had an untimely death at about 49 years of age. Choked on some food one night. His body lies there in Callington cemetery. When Harry Spinks - or Spinksy we used to call him - died, it was the biggest funeral ever seen in the town. And I relate to that, but I changed a few details from red hair to long hair, you know. So I camouflaged the fact that it was Harry, although some people would realise it because I go on to say:

the biggest funeral seen in years
enormous so they say
because everyone for miles around knew Spinksy in some way

was the way I had it first, and I changed it to Smithy, you know.

But, yeah, the town had these colourful characters, Rob. Charlie Bartsch, you know, an old bachelor identity who lived - Bartsch, the same name's around Murray Bridge. I think he was related to those. He lived on the cemetery road just where that comes down and meets the Strathalbyn road. There's still the old farm house. That was where I first worked when I left school.
In fact, another unusual thing happened when I was down playing on that farm. My uncle owned it at the time - Otto Werner. He has a son, Ron, who's been running all the Riverland drycleaning businesses. Werner Drycleaning. I don't know if you've heard of him?

Yes, I have.

RJ: That's his son, Ron. And Ron and I were playing there one day on the farm in War days, probably in about '43 at a guess, when a DC3 started circling the town very, very low and, of course, a DC3 in those days would be like a Jumbo circling low now. You know, that was the plane of the day. And we noticed it only had one engine going. The prop on the other engine had stopped. And anyway, it circled very, very low. A few hundred feet up. And next thing, came lower and lower and disappeared over the scrub land up south of the Callington cemetery, and we started running along the road.
And a humorous thing. There was a fellow in the town by the name of Reeves who was a Pom or Scottish and spoke with a Pommy accent. When he'd greet you he'd say, 'How you going bood?' You know, for bud. He caught up to us with his old dog sitting in the back of his tourer car. He said, 'Which way did it go boys?' And when we told him 'out that way', instead of telling us to jump in, off he goes like a bat out of hell. Left us still running. When we got out there we could see the thing crash landed in the paddock with only one wheel down because one motor had stopped - you obviously had to have both motors going for the hydraulics - and when it landed, the one wheel - they'd have been better belly landing but they had one wheel down and when that hit the turf, the plane spun along with the other wing gouging along. Luckily, it didn't flip but it skidded right across the paddock.
I could take you to the paddock now in the back of what we called Ruben Jaensch's scrub. It's near where the freeway - when you go through the dip and you start to ascend out of Callington from the lowest point from the cross-over, you come to a bit of scrub land. I see a For Sale sign - Land for Sale

notice there now. Just as you pass that bit of scrub, that was the paddock where the plane came down on the side of the ranges.
You tell me when this isn't relevant.

No, that's fine.
But how did you come to join the South Australian Railways?

RJ: Well, when I left school I went to work on Higgs' farm, which is where Charlie Bartsch lived. Charlie met his death, by the way, right in front of our house in the Bremer. He used to go up and hit the drink a bit at the hotel, and he came staggering down and he missed the turn that comes down onto the Erskine bridge. He went down - I don't know why. He'd lived there all his life but he must have been drunk.
He went to the next turn south. Almost down to the Police Station. Came down past the homestead I said was my old Granddad's, and walked to the bank of the creek thinking he was coming onto the bridge, but he stepped straight over the bank. And I remember the day my Mother said, 'Come out the front, son, and have a look. Charlie Bartsch is lying face down in the water'. Right opposite our house there was Charlie in about three inches of water, and met his death there. So they had to, you know, have the body removed.
But, anyway, I worked on Higgs' farm. That was where Charlie Bartsch lived. George Higgs, who still lives up at Gawler, he went up to the Barossa from there. Sometimes he calls himself Kevin Higgs. It was GK Higgs. He was a young married fellow with a family and I went to work there.
I left school the day I turned fourteen. The Headmaster was a bloke by the name of Jim Condon, father of Crows' Manager, John Condon. Jim Condon went over and spoke to my Dad and said words to the effect, 'Will you let the boy go onto High School. He's going fairly well at school and he should have a secondary education'. But the old Dad with a German rural background couldn't see any benefit in secondary education and said, 'No. His two older brothers are making a living shearing sheep and trapping rabbits, and he can do the same'. So I left school the day I turned fourteen. Went to work on Higgs' farm a few months later.
As in the Lutheran Church the tradition of Confirmation, you know, had a lot of importance, especially in those days. And so I completed that. I was confirmed at the little Salem Church on August 13th, 1950.

Had put in my time at my brother's garage. He had actually taken over the Vic Lehmann garage I mentioned up on the corner there, from Vic Lehmann, and so I worked there. And then after the Confirmation, went to work on Higgs' farm. Was there a couple of years. Decided there wasn't a lot of future there. Did a season grape cutting at Langhorne Creek down at - first of all at Clements, who are probably west - you sort of go along - at Langhorne Creek they start one end of the town and you work along, and I went to Bleasdale.
I was working there at Popps(?) Bleasdale, the big vineyards there, in a big team, when Arty Popps(?) who was in charge at the time, one of the three brothers - there was Arty, Ditty and Fiddle. Arty came to me, and they were building new homes across the road, and one of them was for his son, John Popps(?).
John was famed for having taken a catch at a Test Match in Adelaide Oval one day. His photo I can remember was on the front of the 'Tiser or whatever. Anyway, Johnnie Popps(?) is no longer with us. He died an untimely death a few years ago.
But they were putting the new roof on this home, and Arty Popps(?) came to me and said, 'Young fellow, if you'd like a change from cutting, the carpenter needs a hand putting the roof on there. You can carry tiles and so on'. The carpenter was a fellow from Milang, whose name escapes me just for the moment. Ross - Murray Ross. Ross is a big name around Milang. Boat building and so on. He'd been a boat builder. So I helped Murray Ross put the roof on this home.
And then Davison's who had a big farm at Callington - as you descend the freeway into Callington, coming down to the bridge and the run off and so on for the town, there's a big farm house on the left, on the side of the hill.

Yes, I know it.

RJ: Well, that was Davison's farm. And that guy approached me and asked whether I'd like to come back and work on the farm. They needed a farm hand. So I went back.
I had this motor bike there at Callington. I told you I bought that when I was only fifteen and a half and my sixteenth birthday was fast approaching. I went back to Davison's. I'm not sure why because I was on a bit higher pay down there at Bleasdale and so on.

In fact, I have a legacy from that. A scar there in my - I think it's that eyebrow on that side. The old uncle and I were stone picking up there, just where the freeway comes down - of course, we never knew there'd be a freeway there in our wildest dreams. But we were picking stone one day, and he was sitting in the front of the truck having a smoke and I was driving. It was off the main road. I didn't have a licence. As I said I wasn't yet sixteen but I used to drive a truck on the farm - Bedford truck.

And next thing, the dogs started fighting on the load of rocks on the back. I'd taken my old dog to work with me, which my Mother used to frown upon because of my Uncle Art. He's the husband of Aunty Gert, who's in the book there, 'Ferreting with Aunty Gert'. And the dog started fighting on the back. So we got out the front of the truck. My uncle had been having a smoke. He'd rolled his own. And I got out the driver's side and walked back at the same time as he got out the passenger side. He picked up a rock probably, you know, the size of a pound of butter, let fly at the dogs but clean missed the dogs and copped me right in the head. And I hit the deck. It dropped me like a sack of potatoes, so to speak. And I had to be rushed off to Murray Bridge and, you know, have it stitched up and all that sort of thing.

But, anyway, getting back to work. I was there on Davison's farm. This fellow, Davison, also owned property at Scottsburn(?) near Woodside, and he was somewhat of a squire. He also had land I believe in England, and he used to go to England. He used to drive a Jaguar and a Riley and so on. He would come up to the farm, you know, as the squire sort of thing, and cigarette holder. I remember the day he came across to me - Stan Peaker(?) was the Manager - and he said, 'Stan's told me you're finishing up, lad. What are you going to do?' And I said, 'Mr Davison, I'm going to join the South Australian Railways. The local Stationmaster has approached me and offered me a job with the Railways. The fellow - Don Baverstock(?) - who used do the Sedan run has finished up because he's colour blind and he doesn't have a future in the Railways. He's taking a job as a barman at the Cunningham(?) pub, so I'm starting there'. I started there on the 8th December '52.

And I remember Mr Davison's words. He shook his head, and said, 'No future there, boy. No future there'. *(Laughter)* I wonder now. There wasn't a lot of future on the farm. But, anyway, that was his comment.

I had got some experience there. I used to go - they used to send the farm hands up to Scottsburn(?) shearing time. Actually the people there - I'm trying

to just think of their names that were running the show. There were two brothers. I think one fellow that worked there was a Ringwood. I think his son might be a solicitor in Mount Barker or something like that. I've seen the name up there. But, anyway, Walker - yes, the two Walker brothers used to run the farm at Scottsburn(?).
So I joined the Railways on 8th December '52, and I was assistant to the guard on the Sedan track. A little RX loco with a brake van in tow. We'd come up from Mile End, pick me up at Callington, we'd go down through the Valley, over the range to Monarto South. There the big engines had deposited the loading. They'd taken that through the hills. We'd pick it up. Monday afternoons and Thursday afternoons at about 2 pm we'd choof off out of Monarto Station, over the Princes Highway, past where Monarto Zoo now stands, and then away we would go. Pallamana, Tepko, Apamurra, Milendella, Sanderson, *(sounds like, Canapa)*, Cambrai, Sedan.
We would unload, you know, all of the goods along the way, and also the pipes and the cement for the Mannum/Adelaide pipeline that was being built then. And we would deposit gear - you know, corn sacks, wool bales, implements, you name it. You know, the Railways would cart it out.
The wine. The wine would be taken out. The sales people used to go through from the Barossa. I think it was Basedow Wines. So then we would have a louvre car of wine and we would put this out - crates of wine. Anything, you know, that was required.
Library books for the kids from the Public Library. We'd pick up the other library books on the way back.
So then we'd arrive at Sedan anytime between 6 pm and 9 pm, and we would put the loco around the triangle. There was a triangle. I think the rails are still there to reverse the direction of the loco. Park the loco down at the coal heap, down near the barracks. The barracks were right against the Swan Reach road. There's no sign of them there now. I've had a look. I think all that's there is the old water tank. There was a big reservoir. I went looking for that but all that's there is a depression in the mallees.

Yes, that is still there.

RJ: Yeah, and the concrete. But no water in it or anything, I don't believe. Did you see water in it?

No, I didn't see water in that.

RJ: So that's there - the depression. In fact, we used to swim in that. Firemen - one fireman who lives up at Bridgewater, he and I - he was only a young bloke at the time. Steve, a German fellow. We would strip off in the raw in the moonlight and we would swim in the dam, you know, and then go back. Stay in the barracks overnight. The local charge cleaner, bloke by the name of Archie Perry, he lived in the house that probably still stands in the railway yard. He would light the loco in the morning. Fire it up. He would use the old system like you still see in India and so on where you had the cane basket on the end of a long pole with a fulcrum, and the rope. You know, you'd swing on the rope and you'd swing the big basket of coal around onto the tender. Load it up with - he'd say to the driver, 'How many baskets do you want?' And the driver would say, 'Ten, or twenty', or whatever. You know depending on what they'd need to get back to Mile End. He'd top it up with water. Light it. So by the time we got up and had breakfast - you know you'd be up at five or six and you'd have your breakfast and the loco would be all fired.

Were you making your own breakfast?

RJ: Yes. You cooked your own breakfast. There was a kitchen and bedroom seperate. There's photographs of them in my book. There's photographs there of the barracks.
So then we would choof off down to the station, pick up the loading. Fellows by the name of *(sounds like, Rotey)*, and Kuhn (Keen, I think it was pronounced in German circles but others called it Koon). That's two names that come to mind. They would load waggons, wire trucks and OF trucks of sawn mallee for Mitcham Fuel Supply and North Adelaide Hollards.

Hollards at Mitcham.

RJ: Is that the group that's still there? I bought a plant there the other day.

Yes, it's adjacent to where it used to be.

RJ: Oh, is it?

It used to be opposite the station.

RJ: Oh, did it? So now it's there on that road near the crossing, and they've got plants and -

On Grange Road.

RJ: That's right, yeah. I went there entertaining in the little hall around the corner the other day. Yes, there's a Masonic Lodge Hall just around the corner, yeah.

So that's where the mallee was loaded.
But that Sedan line, were many of the farmers near the sidings dependent on that in those days?

RJ: They would've been, you know, for goods that came up. There'd be trucks of super and so on, yeah. I guess some of them brought their own, as cockies did. Some used to transport their own gear if they had a good truck or whatever. But we would certainly bring a lot of it.
There was also a lime kiln there somewhere. I think that was the name Bartsch again. I think it was Bartsch's lime kiln. I could be confused with Murray Bridge, although, no, it's *(sounds like, Gair-rans)* at Murray Bridge. *(sounds like, Gair-rans)* lime kiln.
I reckon it was Bartsch because they used to make a heck of a mess of your uniform. You'd pick up these, you know, sacks - hessian sacks - of lime and, of course, the powder would come right through and you couldn't brush it off your black SAR trousers.

Just like chalk.

RJ: Yeah. Horrible stuff. So they would often bring in this lime. Might be twenty bags of lime, thirty bags of lime, if there wasn't a truck load.
So then you would choof off with your couple of trucks of wood and your sundries. You always had a sundries car. You know, an M car or a DWF into which you placed the goods. So then along the way it would be my duties to do the guards road bill, to pick up library books, cans of cream, cans of milk. Would be addressed to Finlaysons or whatever.

And so come into Cambrai. You might have a truck or two of - see, the grain then - a fellow by the name of Ron Atkinson (and he's still alive). I think he's retired up around Gawler. They tell me he's had a leg off due to diabetes and had a few problems. But Ron Atkinson, his Dad had the wheat agency there. Of course, they've got silos now but it was stacks in those days. We'd pick up grain and that from there and then on to *(sounds like, Canapa).*
Eggs was another thing. *(sounds like, Canapa)*, there'd always be a few cases of eggs in the little humpy. You might have to pick a waggon up there - whatever. An empty super waggon, you know, that had taken super out. On down to next stop - you know, Sanderson, Milendella, whatever. Attach waggons.
The girl who worked in the local shop there - people by the name of Maxwell had the shop at Sanderson. I see the shop is still there. It's probably still got the name Maxwell on it. They tell me Mrs Maxwell is still alive, in her 90's, at Murray Bridge. The girl - Archie Perry's daughter from Sedan - she worked in that shop and she would travel with us home on the Monday and Thursday afternoon, just have a night with her parents and come back with us next morning.
So, yes, you picked up goods all along the way. There was always waggons of grain at Pallamana, and Tepko, and Apamurra, and so on.
A bloke by the name of Kuchel. He was a cousin of my Fathers. He's still alive in Murray Bridge. He used to be the wheat agent at Pallamana.
One night we were going up there and we had a terrific sandstorm at Apamurra. We were there late in the afternoon and this storm blew, and it was so strong all the paddocks - it must have been autumn and the paddocks were prepared - fallowed, you know - for seeding, and all the sand came through. You couldn't see your hand in front of you. And we were marooned there. We had to stay there overnight.
And a fellow by the name of Max *(sounds like, Ei-stead)* was the Stationmaster there at the time. He had a little Ford Prefect. He drove us to the Palmer pub. We stayed there overnight, got up in the morning and there was three feet of sand over the track just towards Milendella. Because that night, while we were in the station sheltering from this storm, we heard a fellow banging on the door and we let him in and he was the local Methodist Church parson, and he'd got his car stuck on the track in this sand and his wife's still in it and the guy was a nervous wreck. You know, he'd walked along in this blinding sand, following

the rails as best he could, staggered into the station, you know. And you've got no idea just how - you know, your visibility was nil.
I can still remember when we went into the brake van in the morning, the cracks in the doorways of the brake van had all little pyramids of sand spread across the floor of the GB's(?) it was so strong. And they couldn't turn the reversing wheel on the loco. It had all sanded up. And we finally got going - the gang had to shift this three foot of sand off the track. We got on as far as Cambrai but there the roof of the wheat stacks had blown off and that was lying all upside down across the track, so we couldn't get past that. We had to run tender first back to Apamurra. We couldn't get to Sedan.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

So, Ray, that's a little bit about the line. I'd like to hear a bit more really about some of the characters and incidents that occurred. A bit like the storm you were describing. There must've been many occasions that were a bit of a hoot.

RJ: Relating to the Sedan track?

Yes.

RJ: Yeah, there was a fellow there, a guard there, on one occasion who obviously had a problem. We were shunting at Monarto South and next thing he was in under - coupling up a couple of waggons when suddenly his face became all - well, screwed up, contorted, whatever might be the right word. Or twisted. Saliva began running from the side of his mouth and I realised he was having some sort of a fit.
Anyway, he was there for a minute or so and then he seemed to return to normal and he clambered out from between the waggons and I asked him what the problem was. And so when we got going down the track, I persisted with this and he still kept on passing it off as though there was nothing wrong at all. And anyway, it turned out that he had had an accident, you know, off a push-bike and hit his head and this was recurring, and he pleaded with me to not say anything about it, and so I didn't. I just covered the whole thing up. Someone else saw him. The next day this occurred and this person wanted to ring up and report it, and I said, 'No, look, he realises. He can feel it coming on'. And

so he went on to a grand old age and as far as I know he worked till the day he was 65 and somehow he got away with this problem that he had.
Yeah, there was certainly the little incidents, you know. It was a bit of a picnic railway I suppose. It was away from train control and this sort of thing, and the guys regarded this, you know, as a bit of a holiday trip. You didn't have anyone looking down on you and it was always the colourful characters who would stop the train to pick mushrooms on the side of the track, or whatever.

Really?

RJ: Yes, yes. If they knew where there were mushrooms, or if they sighted them. One driver - a character - he would have apples that he'd picked, you know, down along the track, but then he would head off. The train would come to a halt. He'd get his push-bike down off the tender and away he would start marching across to a house may be a mile away from the track to swap the apples for eggs. Quarter of an hour later, back he would come on the bike, clamber back, get the fireman to lift his bike back up onto the tender, and so on, and on we'd go.

Oh, really?

RJ: Yeah.

(Interruption on tape)

Just saying, Ray, that this is really a side of rural life that nobody knows about. Today a lot of the lines are gone. Although that line's still there, isn't it? Through Apamurra?

RJ: Well, to Apamurra, there's been - standardised to there, yeah. I guess someone in their wisdom has done this. I'm, I guess, amazed that they have. That they find it viable. You know, it must have cost - although when I crossed the track the other day on this trip back from Cambrai in the coach, it looked to me as though it was still the old sleepers and just probably they moved the rail in or something like that. I suppose there was no big cost involved, and probably that's why it is viable. So, yes, it is still there to Apamurra.
It was a great time. And we would get there at night. Sometimes the crews would go down to the pub at Sedan. A fellow by the name of Felix - that's all I remember. They'd talk about Felix. And they would go down there and have a

few beers and play cards till 10 o'clock. I would wander off down to the town with the Perry kids with the girl who worked there from the shop - Glenys was the eldest one. She was about my age and she had young brothers and sisters. Two of the boys I think are probably driving with Australian National up at Port Augusta. That's what I'd heard. Because Archie Perry did head off from there to Port Augusta or somewhere as Charge Cleaner. But we would walk down the street. I'd buy an ice-cream or two off old Ralph Marshall, or Greiger's shop. They used to be open after tea at night. Stroll back and then go to bed in the barracks, and so on.

Well, was Sedan a viable town in the 50's?

RJ: I wouldn't have known a lot about the town, Rob. I guess it would've been. The people, Greiger's, as I remembered, who had the little shop then still I believe - the descendants - still have the big - I think it's the Four Square store that stands there now.

Yes, it is.

RJ: And that's still the same Greiger's. And old Ralph Marshall's shop was diagonally across the road on the south side. I think they had the Post Office and all. They may still have it.

Yes, they did have a Post Office there, from my memory.
So it was a pretty rich and wondrous life for a young lad I guess.

RJ: It was, yeah. It was very colourful life and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It all changed when a fellow who had been at Tailem Bend, he got the position of Stationmaster Sedan. The South Australian Railways decided to re-open the station at Sedan and close the one at Apamurra. And so it was all moved up - in fact, I remember well the day we transported the safe - the security safe - that every station had. They probably weighed two or three cwt. They were a massive piece of steel.
When we got to Sedan we couldn't get it in through the doorway because the counter inside was such that you couldn't manipulate around and get this thing in, and so this Stationmaster fellow said, 'Oh, well, we'll have to put it through the window'. So they opened the window - it was a sash type window - lifted it up and the four of us got it from the brake - well, we already had it from the

brake van and we were carrying it, so we went around to the window and placed it in the open window (it must have been a large window to take this) on the sill.
And we said, 'Right, two of you hang on to the safe while two others go around in through the doorway to balance it from the inside'. But the fellows on the outside actually let it lean away from them. It's like a motor bike. If you go to put a motor bike on a stand, and having ridden one for 64,000 miles I'm well aware, if you let them lean away from you, there's nothing you can do but let them fall and you usually jump over them as they drag you with them. But this safe lent away, and while we were going through the doorway we heard this almighty crash and the safe went straight through the floor of the - smashed the floorboards and went straight through into the dirt.
And I remember this fellow being all upset. You know, he didn't want to report that we'd wrecked the floor of the station before he even moved in. And so, you know, he must've repaired it himself. But that was the movement from Apamurra. And that was probably in about 1954 because this fellow then - I don't think it ever got going.
And so, what I started to say, he had a son - this fellow's name was Sid Smith and he had a son Ross Smith - and he was the age that he was looking for a job and so it was decided, you know, that this would suit him seeing his parents lived at Sedan, and so the Railways actually wrote to me and told me that I was to be transferred as an Assistant Shunter at Mile End. And the local Stationmaster, Angie Watts, who had got me the job at Callington - he was the local JP and football umpire and so on - he was a bit perturbed about this. He said, 'Do you actually want to be an Assistant Shunter?' Because from there on you naturally have to become a guard and so on and I didn't want that life, living out of a tucker box.
So Angie was always one to look after one's interests. I can remember that standing there the day he rang the Head Office in Adelaide, and said, 'Look, you know, you've told this lad that he has to go to Mile End as an Assistant Shunter. He doesn't want a bar of that'. And Angie was singing my praises. He said, 'Look, this lad can do anything. He plays the saxophone in the dance band. He can shear sheep', which was a bit of, you know, not handling the truth particularly well. I'd been shed hand and this sort of thing. I'd only shorn one sheep in my life. *(Laughter in voice)* Perhaps after shearing one you could say you can shear sheep, but that was during smoke-o one day on

Davison's farm. And he said, 'He's going to give it away. He's going to leave. We're going to lose a good lad'. You know, I'm just telling you what Angie said. I don't say that I, you know believe all this, and it's modesty aside that I say it at all. But that was Angie's story.
And they said, 'Right. Leave it with us and we'll see what we can do'. So next thing, there was a phone call received, 'Look, would the lad be interested in being a Relief Porter in the Adelaide Division?' So Angie said to me, 'What would you think about that?' And I said, 'That'd suit me down to the ground'. So I was appointed as a Relief Porter in the Adelaide Division in, I think it would've been, 1955, and away I went for two years all over the place.
The first job was Snowtown. I could give you the actual dates of when I went to all these places. I've got them all recorded but probably not relevant.
And I remember riding the motor bike on Sunday afternoon to Snowtown. My Mother had given me gear to batch. They'd told me there was barracks up there. It was the worst night I've ever spent in my life. Because I went into a room that hadn't been used for years and Snowtown - I didn't know having come from Callington - that it's notorious for mosquitoes, and I spent the whole night swatting mosquitoes. I had blood patches all over the walls and the ceiling. I didn't get a wink of sleep, and I went off to work in the morning feeling like death warmed up, and probably looking like it, too. Bloke by the name of Jim McCauliffe(?) was Stationmaster there at the time. And Snowtown was a very busy station in those days. You know, you sorted out all the loading, you know, for across to Brinkworth and -

Salt coming down from Lochiel then, too.

RJ: That's right, yes. And you had the branch line to Kadina. And I was actually lost because I didn't know the locality. I didn't know the order of the stations. You had the Pirie Expresses going through there like rockets, you know, with 520 locos on boring through there at 60 mile an hour.
I still remember the day that I went down to let an MIC - the Dort car - you know the MIC's? The cars that run on the tracks?

Oh, yes.

RJ: We called them MIC, but Dort, the German company - we called them Dort cars because originally they were made in Germany by Dort, and so that

name stuck. And the Dort car was coming in and it had Assistant Superintendent in it coming down from Kadina way. And I was down at the switches waving him in and they wouldn't come in. And I wondered why. And next thing this fellow - Dixon was his name, Tommy Dixon, Assistant Supe, little short bloke - got out and he came walking towards me. And I kept waving them in, and he said, 'You want us to come in?' I said, 'Yeah'. He said, 'Why is the signal still hanging down for a train to come from Adelaide?' The lower quadrant signal was down in the clear position. I said, 'Oh, that's still hanging down from when the Express went through', not realising how dumb a statement this was because the rule book said you always had to return signals to the stop position as soon as - and with my inexperience and being as green as grass, you know - certainly I did the rules up at Railway - Bonehead College, we called it. It was down there where the Festival Theatre is now. I'd done all my rules there but, of course, in many cases you forgot them as quick as you learnt them. They crammed it all into your head. But they had everything out on paper and a signature, you know, that they could hold in front of you to prove that you'd actually done your rules. But doing everything so quickly, you know, how much of it was retained without any actual experience was another matter.

And so this was my answer. And Dixon said, 'Well, you go and put that signal back to stop and we'll come in so long as we know we're not going to run into a train that's going to come boring through'. So that's one story that comes to mind that describes very well my inexperience. *(Laughter in voice)*

I was there a week and there was a fellow that injured his back at Balaklava, so I went over to Balaklava. I was there for some months relieving the Station Porters and also the Goods Shed Porters. Only the day of the Grand Final, I called into Goolwa and looked up a fellow by the name of Les Bormann. In fact, his son is Bormann with the ABC - a journalist. Have you heard of him?

Yes.

RJ: Can't think of his Christian name. He said to me, 'My lad's with the ABC'. Many people had told me about this lad as a journalist and overseas reporter and so on. And so I looked up Les because I hadn't sighted him since those days at Balaklava in '55, and I caught up with him on the way to Victor.

So then I went relieving all over the place. You know, Pirie line. I went as far as Jamestown in the north and as far as Cooke Plains in the south. Later I was to be appointed officially to Signalman Cooke Plains.
In those days, with the old SAR, to get a signalman's job in suburbia they would never give you one unless you went and proved yourself somewhere in the mulga. And you could go Cooke Plains, Coomandook, Kiki - any of those little stations.
So I put in for Signalman Cooke Plains. I went out there in '57. I got married there in '57. Part of the phone call a while ago was mentioning that we've got our 40th coming up in November. And so I was signalman Cooke Plains. I wasn't there many months when I put in for Signalman Albert Park, and also Dudley Park. I think I got Dudley Park first and then I got Albert Park, from memory. Didn't even go to Dudley Park. Came to Albert Park, bought our home here. I was a great believer in living near the job especially when you had to open a station at five in the morning, or 5.20 we used to book on down here. You had to be there. If you weren't there, the trains didn't go through and everyone else was late for work.
So bought the home here. Five minutes walk away - thinking I'd be at Albert Park the rest of my life. But, of course, that was a bit of a delusion because - illusion. Little did I know how things would change. It was a very busy station when I came here. Booked on here in February '58. Phillips Industries across the road were in their heyday. There was a thousand workers there. The trains used to go around to Hendon. Hendon had been a munition works during the War. So that is now, of course, the boulevard. They pulled up that track. The Government actually bought about 37 homes through here and then changed their mind, as Government's do, and didn't use the homes after everyone was removed.
And so, a very busy station. You'd date up 100 tickets here in the morning when you booked on, and they'd be gone by 9 o'clock, and as well as that you did the signal cabin. You run the cabin. You were there on your own, and so on. But that's not the rural industry anyway.

How did you feel, Ray? Was there a difference between those rural areas that you served and the city? Did you feel a difference?

RJ: Oh, vast difference. At Cooke Plains you would go to work. It was a little humpy that stood beside the track. A little wood and iron building. It had a little table interlocker, as it was known, that you operated to let trains in each side. It wasn't a signalman as such. You had no other levers that operated any points or signals. You had to ride the push-bike out and turn the switch stand to let a train into the siding. There's lots of stories relating to that.
It was all around the clock. And it wasn't a particularly good job at all. That's the little humpy there.
So you would book on. And the hours weren't at all regular. Sometimes you would book on at 4 o'clock in the morning, or half past three, for the Blue Lake coming from Mount Gambier. The Overland from Melbourne used to go through there at 5.29 in the morning, as I remember it. And Sunday, you would have a Sunday off but then you would have to book on at 8.15 pm Sunday night. And so I was going with my wife at Murray Bridge at the time - my girlfriend then, as she was then. Back you would go, book on and you would go right through to next morning.
And there was such a big break between trains. And you didn't have electricity or water. There was no power on. You had a lamp on the table that would probably ruin your eyes if you read by it. So you'd take a pillow and a blanket and you'd go to sleep. And there would be many times when they would ring for a staff at half past three in the morning for the Blue Lake. And you would jump off the counter in a stupor not knowing whether it was Monday or Friday or whether you were at work or where you were because you were in a dead sleep. And next thing, you would get this ding/ding, you know, on the staff instrument. So that's the kind of job it was.
I even used to do a bit of wheat lumping there. I bloke by the name of Ron Humble had the local shop and he was the wheat agent, and he would come across to me if I was on midnight shift and I'd woken up at four in the afternoon, he'd come over and ask me would I lump some bags. He'd be loading a Y truck or a OF truck and I would take them from the elevator, and so on.
Went back to trapping rabbits also, by the way, down there.

Really?

RJ: Yeah. Used to head off with the trap.

That would've been big days for rabbit trapping.

RJ: That's right, yes.

The myxee came in not long after, I think.

RJ: That's right. Rabbits and brown snakes. Cooke Plains is notorious for brown snakes, and I could spend half an hour telling you snake stories.

So did you discern a difference, too, in the nature of community in those rural areas? You said everybody knew everybody in Callington. You've come to the city and you've been brought up in the country, did you feel there was a difference between the people?

RJ: People, I believe, are really pretty much the same everywhere. You know, you hear people say that country people and suburban people and so on. They don't vary a lot. You have the people that are fine and beautiful to get along with in suburbia. You have them in the country. You have the people that are hard to get along with. Those that are, you know, more difficult. I don't really think they vary. So many people in suburbia have their roots extending to the country anyway. When I go around entertaining, they relate very readily to stories that one tells because they've grown up out there or they've spent a lot of their life out there.

And people, you know, are on this planet for 60, 70, 80, 90, maybe 100 years in some cases. In fact, I'm going to me emcee for a fellow's 100th birthday on the 1st November - Perc Hocking. And he was a Porter at Monarto South the day I joined the job, and Perc still works at Meals on Wheels. And I heard them say - or my wife read out - they're going to build a new $5million kitchen or something down here, and she said, 'I wonder will Perc be there to open it'. Because he's as fit as a fiddle. And he's the father of Frank Hocking who was the SM here at Albert Park when I started at Albert Park.

But, no, I wouldn't say I found a vast difference. People look after their own interest. I can still remember the day I was going around my traps at Cooke Plains and I ran into a fellow - in fact, I met him entertaining here a while back on the other side of town around Mitcham or somewhere - who came and asked me was that my traps out in so-and-so's paddock. I said, 'Yes'. And he said, 'Well, that's my territory you know. You'd better get them out of there because I've trapped there -'. So you pulled your traps out and you moved them. Everyone had their territory. *(Laughter in voice)* And they told you so.

Just to sort of pull things together, Ray, what would the biggest changes have been you saw in those rural areas that you once knew? You spoke a bit about how sad it was to see Callington today as against your youth, but what would the biggest changes be to those areas that you knew as a child?

RJ: Perhaps the biggest changes were in the leisure hours. The entertainment and so on. People went about their work. People worked pretty hard in those days. You know, I can remember my old Dad telling me that his first job - and he lived to be 95 and so he goes back to the start of the century - but I can remember him telling me his first boss - when he left his own farm this was and went out to work - his boss said, 'Look, you won't need a watch. Sunrise will be your time to start and sunset will be your time to finish'. And they were long days. It was hard yakker and you were paid a pittance, and I really think if my old Mum didn't have a couple of cows and a dozen or two chooks, that we wouldn't have gotten by, you know. Because you had your basics there. She made her own butter. And people really had to rough it out.

And I think probably the biggest change is that lifestyle. People made do in those days. You often hear people say that young couples in this day and age have to start with everything. It has to be a good house. There has to be two cars. You didn't even think that way. You got by and, you know, you worked your guts out virtually to get by, and if you couldn't afford it, you didn't buy it. And so many people run into problems.

Leisure hours, everything revolved around the wireless at night. You sat there and you had your programmes. I talk about this when I'm entertaining. You've had the ABC News. You had Greenbottle, and a bit later on you had When a Girl Marries if you wanted something romantic. 'Dedicated to those who are in love and to all those who can remember' were the opening words. You had Mrs Obbs, the old soapie. Quarter past seven, as I remember, Courtship and Marriage. Martin's Corner, and so on. At night you had your Bonnington's Bunkhouse Show, Ada and Elsie, Hal Lashwood, Mo McCackie - all these people. And that was your entertainment.

You had your euchre evenings at the local school as a fundraiser where the adults would be inside and the kids chase each other in the moonlight outside. Sometimes they would be in the hall but they had the little tables and everyone moved around from one table to another. And so life was modest.

As I said before, with Cooke Plains, no water and power laid on. Same at Callington. It has it now but in those days there would be many times at the end of summer when my Mother would say I'm going to have to let the garden die. The tanks are almost empty. There's still water in the underground tank. We need that for drinking but the garden has to go - the flowers and vegies. And so it would be left die. But people got by.

Even though life was modest and you eked out a living - you know, as a labourer my Father would've been paid a pittance, so to speak, and you probably wondered where the next quid was coming from at times between jobs. But it's a paradox but people were really happier and more contented in that environment than what most people are now. You didn't have your problems that you hear about now.

There's something about boredom and time on your hands that a lot of people can't handle and they run into all sorts of problems, and they tend to do the negative things in life, and all sorts of problems emanate from that.

So, yes, life was very, very different. Even as kids. You know, the kids these days seem to have to be entertained. We entertained - I mean, people didn't sit around and entertain. They were too busy, you know, surviving. Kids from an early age, you played together. And I believe that it bred ingenuity in people.

A lad, Ian Fraser, a good friend of mine, who lives at Croydon, with whom I grew up there and spent a lifetime with, he had six sisters and a big family there, and Mrs Fraser was there on her own while her husband was down here working in town. Also at Islington and so on with the Railways, and would only come home usually Saturday nights and back Sunday night. And that family really had to struggle. But, you know, people got by.

And as I was going to say about Ian, we're probably - modesty aside - handymen because you learnt as a kid to fashion toys. You made your bows and arrows. We used to devise a type of dart, that I haven't seen any kid use, that you fired with a piece of rubber like a shanghai, and you made the fins at the back like a rocket out of the covers of your exercise book. You had your grey/blue cover - that harder, stiffer paper - and you cut that into a square and you folded it finlike as in the tail of a rocket. And you cut a cross into the back of the little piece of timber, fitted that in, pointed it, cut a notch with your pocket knife on the side to take your cord and your rubber, and we would fire those probably for a couple of hundred yards, or up into the air.

We were good with bows and arrows. We were like Red Indians. And with shanghais.
The games we would - we would knock up a big propeller. May be, oh, four feet long and drive a roofing nail through this and nail it onto the end of a piece of timber, and we'd elevate it on a box - a big box - so it could turn - a box like a car crate - and that was for us an aeroplane. And we would sit in there reading comics. And this great piece of iron - an old piece of galvanised iron - may be a galvanised iron sheet that we've flattened out - it might be six inches wide and six foot long, whatever, and you would sit in there and here this thing would be revolving in the wind and for us that was an aeroplane, and it developed your imagination. It developed your skills. And kids, you know, miss out on that these days I'm afraid.
Probably the worst thing that's ever happened for kids is television. You sit down in front of that box and that doesn't develop any ingenuity. They probably have a more vast general knowledge than what we have but they won't develop the skills, you know, with their hands and the ability to think for yourself, you know, and nut things out.
As I said, the Bremer, we would get Fraser's old - not underground tank, their iron tank. If there was a thousand gallon tank - eight hundred gallon tank - the size of that one there - no longer used, we would roll that down to the bank of the Bremer, and it's quite steep and the first big thrill we got was letting it go down the bank and away she would go. And she'd bounce off down and into the water. The water summertime, as I said before, would be two/three/four inches deep flowing over the beautiful sand. Then we would get inside of the tank. Usually the bottom had rusted out so that was open, and we would walk along in the tank stepping on the rims in front of us and that would give it momentum. You get what I mean? Like walking inside of a pipe -

Turning around, yes.

RJ: And away we would go. And the water would pick up on the back and come up and drop down. We'd get drenched but here you would walk along the bed of this creek, you know, with your own steam-roller. And we would spend hours messing around, up and down in the water. Up to the bridge and back.

I started to tell you before about the cement bottom on the bridge and I side-tracked myself as I do from time to time. We would get the black mud out of the pools and it was very tacky. Now, we would get there, we would get chunks of this, as much as we could throw, we would get under the bridge and away we would -

(Tape interruption)

So you'd get this mud -

RJ: Yeah. We'd get this mud and we would throw it up and it would adhere to the underside of the bridge - to the concrete. We'd keep tossing it up and some would build up - you know, as one plotch lobbed on another plotch. It would all stick there and we would have kilograms and kilograms of mud on the underside of the bridge. Then we would get four old tobacco sticks. Tobacco trees still grow - I refer to them in the poem of 'Aunty Gert Carrying Home the Rabbits on a Tobacco Stick'. And we used to use these a lot. We would build wurleys. Do you know a tobacco tree when you see one?

No.

RJ: Well, they're very lush. Probably hence the name, tobacco tree. Big leaves. Because we use to break those off in the bed of the Bremer down from the old Callington pub and we would build wurleys out of them when they were young. But in this case you'd get four sticks, may be a metre long, you'd stand them in the ground and we'd cart a sheet of iron down from Fraser's house, put on top of the four sticks and that was our humpy. Wurley, if you like.
Then we would have comics. We used to read Chocolate and the Bosun and we used to read Ginger Meggs. And there again, great to develop a sense of humour, you know. Frase and I have got a crazy sense of humours but I'm sure it come from Wally and the Major, and Chocolate and the Bosun, and Ginger Meggs. You know, we would get all these books. Whenever a new comic come out we would be up at the local Post Office that still stands in the town, there near the old Lutheran Church, to get the latest. You used to get the little threepenny comics from England. You know, an English comic that come out.

Anyway, then we would lie under there and if it was 100 in the water bag it would still be cool under Callington bridge because the south breeze would come up along the Bremer. We would lie there and - of course, as the mud dried it would let go from the underside of the bridge and the great thrill was waiting for the next clump to come down. And at times you would stick - I can remember getting hit in the head. You'd put your head out to see if something was going to come just at the wrong moment. Often it used to be so heavy - if a great clump come down it would wreck our piece of galvanised iron - corrugated iron. It would knock it off the four sticks. And then the thrill was hurrying to put it back up again before another one come down and hit you, you know.

So there were all these primitive games, you know, that you had that I don't think the kids these days would probably think out for themselves. As I said, we had the wurleys. There was all the different games - we had the regular games like cricket and football. We used to get the old discarded football from the Callington team to boot around. It was almost like a basketball because it was so out of shape, you know - besides your other traditional games. But being a country boy - this is beside the bird nesting, you know -

All those things.

RJ: Blowing eggs and, you know, keeping a collection of birds eggs.

Ray, the tape's just about to stop, so I just want to say before that does, thank you very much for sharing those recollections. That's obviously a very wonderful time you had as a young boy.

RJ: Certainly was. Certainly was, yeah.

Well, thanks very much, Ray.

RJ: Pleasure. Pleasure.