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Full transcript of an interview with

KYM BONYTHON

on 22 September 2004

by Rob Linn

for the

**EMINENT AUSTRALIANS ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

Recording available on CD

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Interview with Kym Bonython recorded by Rob Linn on the 22nd September 2004 for The State Library of South Australia Oral History Collection and the National Library of Australia.

DISK 1

This is an interview with Kym Bonython, who'll be speaking with me, Rob Linn, for the Oral History Collection conducted by the National Library of Australia. On behalf of the Director General of the National Library, Kym, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Do you understand that the Library owns copyright in the interview material, but disclosure will be subject to any disclosure restrictions you impose in completing the form of consent?

Yes, I understand that.

This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording should the Library decide to make one?

Yes.

We hope you will speak as frankly as possible, knowing that neither the tapes nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority. This interview is taking place today on the 22nd of September 2004 at North Adelaide.

Kym, could we please begin with your own family? I'd like to talk a bit about the Bonython family, and your mother's family as well. You were born in 1920. Could you tell us a bit about your father first, please, John Lavington Bonython?

Well, the family, of course, are of Cornish origin, and the first person to come to South Australia was Alfred Bonython, who I think was my grandfather's brother. And he came to Australia in 1847 and lived on the side of Mount Barker in the Adelaide Hills. And my grandfather and his father – the family fortunes, apparently, were lost some hundreds of years ago and, although there are still properties called 'Bonython' in Cornwall, I don't think any Bonythons still exist there. There's a nephew of mine who lives in London, he used to live in Cornwall. But anyway, Grandfather's father was a George Bonython, and they went to live in some – I can't think of the name in my old age – an island off the coast of Canada. And then, when Uncle Alfred, as we referred to him, although of course he was long gone by the time I was born, I think he probably persuaded his brother to come to Australia. And

Grandfather came to Adelaide in 1854, bringing with him a then five-year-old Langdon Bonython, who started off his career as sort of office boy at *The Advertiser*, and by the time he was thirty-seven, I believe through some wise investments in minerals, *et cetera*, he was able to purchase the paper. And of his children, Lavington was the eldest, that was my father.

And he worked in the office. I think he was in a lesser role, I think he was involved with one of the *Advertiser* papers, *The Chronicle* or something like that, but he really devoted most of his life to civic affairs. For instance, he was on the Adelaide City Council for forty-three years. He stood for Lord Mayor, I think, about – h'm, not sure – about 1914 or '15. And there was the rather famous story of him addressing an audience in the Town Hall the night before the election, and somebody from the crowd yelled out, 'Does your mother know you're out?' And Father said, 'Yes, and tomorrow I'll be in!' And he was, and there he stayed for forty-three years in various capacities, twice as Lord Mayor. His first wife died in 1908, I think, and he married my mother when she was only twenty-one and, as a consequence, she was known as the 'Baby Mayoress'. (laughter)

But no, my father and grandfather were God-fearing men. I always used to say my father never told rude stories or anything, and in his latter years he'd occasionally trot out his one joke and almost collapse with embarrassed laughter when he told it, you know. And the story was: 'Did you hear about the pilot that decided to go home one morning and surprise his wife? And by hell-'e-copped-'er!' (laughter) And Dad thought that was terribly risqué, so that was sort of the atmosphere I grew up with, they were gentle, kindly people and I like to think they willingly helped a lot of people less fortunate than themselves. And he was not a great disciplinarian. Mother was a do-gooder and a lovely woman who so many people, even now, tell me how much they admired her.

So we were a happy family. There were six children in the family. My father had three by his first wife, who was the daughter of a Premier of South Australia, Bray, and then, in the second family, starting in 1916, my brother Warren was born and then my sister Katherine, and I was the youngest, who was born in 1920. In those early days, we lived in 329 Wakefield Street, Adelaide, and there were big Moreton Bay figs along the street and a tramline that ran past, through the parklands, down Wakefield Street. And we lived there for the first eight years of my life until, in

1928, we moved to a house on the corner of Gilles Street and East Terrace, which my father named 'St Corantyn', after an old family property in Cornwall.

How do you spell 'Corantyn', please?

C-O-R-A-N-T-Y-N. And after my father died in 1960, the house was sold and it became a sort of hospital. Once again, as I used to say, 'inhabited by nuts' – it was a mental rehabilitation place, as I understand it.

What are your memories of that house, Kym?

Beautifully cool. I remember the day [of] the record temperature in, I think, the beginning of 1939 and it was so cool in there compared with outside. But it was a big, rather elegant, house, and of course facing onto the parklands. You could stand on the upstairs veranda and watch the horses go past in Victoria Park Racecourse. And it was almost on the corner of East Terrace and South Terrace, just a few doors. And anyway, we were still living there when World War II started and I actually volunteered in October '39, but I didn't actually start my Air Force career until the very beginning of March 1940.

Could I just go back a tad, and talk about the personalities and characters that were your family? You've mentioned their gentleness. I think your father worshipped at Pirie Street Church, is that right?

Yes. It was – Susan Mitchell has written a book about the Snowtown murders, which was, whilst flattering in its references to me, there were a couple of mistakes. They said that we were a Methodist family. My grandfather and father were both regular worshippers at the Pirie Street Methodist Church, but all my family, when we went to church, it was at St John's Anglican Church in Halifax Street, so that basically we were Anglicans, not Methodists. But I know my father religiously went to Pirie Street Methodist Church every Sunday, and I think his father before him.

Do you have strong memories of your grandfather, Kym?

Yes, oh yes, yes. Yes, he was a very kindly man. Of course, you know, he lived – he'd sort of work until two o'clock in the morning getting the paper out, and would sleep until midday. And he had two spinster daughters who lived there with him. My cousin Erica's parents died at a very early age in Eric's life. He lived there for a number of years.

This is where?

At 'Carclew' –

'Carclew', yes.

– North Adelaide, yes. Wonderful position there. In fact, it was bought after Grandfather and the aunts died, with the intention of building the Festival Theatre there, but for various reasons – one of which, I presume, was that it was directly beneath the aircraft approach line to the Adelaide Airport; and, the other thing, the lack of existing public transport – they eventually built it where it finished up. And Carclew became a youth arts centre, which it still is today, I think.

So is your grandmother in your memory, too?

Vaguely. She died when I was maybe nearly four –

Right.

– but the earliest photo I have of our family group was three months after I was born, on Christmas Day 1920, and I was being nursed on my mother's lap and Grandmother was there, and there were a few other – – –. I don't really remember much about her, vaguely, that's all.

What about your father's work? Did you have much exposure to that as a child, or as you were growing up?

No, well, I used to go into *The Advertiser* a lot. Grandfather had, you know, his office overlooked King William Street, opposite the Town Hall, and I always remember we always used to go to Grandfather's office on Anzac Day to watch the march past, and things like that. But I didn't sort of haunt the production areas of the paper, I was just aware of it but not in any way involved or with aspirations to become a journalist myself.

Did your father and mother's civic duties mean that you were often looked after at home by others?

Well, we always had nannies and things, you know. In those days I think we had a cook, a maid and a nursemaid, in my youth. But they rarely were away, they spent most of their life as a family living in Adelaide, and I can't remember Mother being overseas except when I was in my teens, when she and my sister Katherine went to England, and Katherine came back bearing, amongst other things, some recordings

by Count Basie which I promptly purloined for myself! (laughs) And we had a neighbour who lived round the corner on East Terrace, called Dean Hay, who owned the South Australian Brush Company, and it was he who introduced me to Duke Ellington. And my godfather was Alfred Corbin, who lived next door to Dean Hay. Mr Corbin was involved with the Adelaide Steamship Company. And my uncle, Sir Peter Angus Parsons, was the Chief Justice, and he lived almost next door *again*, so there was a little strip where relations and friends lived.

I'm just thinking Bert Hamilton would have been there somewhere, too.

Bert Hamilton lived opposite us when we were at 'St Corantyn's'.

Yes, okay, this is Wakefield Street.

He was on the other corner of Gilles Street and East Terrace.

So, Kym, where were you educated, then?

Well, like my brother Warren and my half-brother Jack, I went to St Peter's College. Well, actually, I – – – Well, let's go right back to the beginning. The first school I went to was – now called Pembroke, but in those days it was Girton. I'm not sure what age I was taken there, but I disliked it so much that I spent the morning crying and they took me away. And the next school I went – when we came back from living in Sydney I tried to enrol my sons in Pembroke School, as it was by then called, and one of the questions that prospective students' parents had to answer: 'Have you or any of your family ever attended the school?' And I said, 'Yes, one half of a day in 1925.' (laughter) But I finished up going just around the corner from where we live now, to a girls' school, Creveen, which was on the corner of Palmer Place and Kermode Street, and I went to the kindergarten section of Creveen. And one of the things that survived the bushfire proved rather prophetic: the Headmistress was Kathleen Mellor, and in my school report of, I think, 1925, the Headmistress's report was 'Kym doesn't join with the other children in set games, but prefers to swing on his own.' (laughter) Of course, 'swing' means rather different things now than it did then, but there was a swing in the backyard of Creveen and I used to spend a lot of time swinging in the backyard of that school, with a girl called Bidy Hack, who's still an inmate of the Helping Hand Nursing Home over here in North Adelaide.

Kym, did either Creveen or St Peter's College shape you in any way for your future?

No, I didn't stay – I can't remember how long I stayed there, but I finished up going to Queen's College, which is on Barton Terrace, North Adelaide, and then I started at – I suppose that was a formative period of my life. I remember John Horner was the music teacher at Queen's, and he undoubtedly, together with my mother's wide-ranging interests in music and art and literature – – –. Because I started at St Peter's in 1930, when I would have turned ten later that year, and I stayed there till I left school in the end of 1938. But, as I said, the family was not a very disciplinarian family, my mother was rather indulgent. Occasionally my father would, when we were driving, he'd say, 'Smack him across the mouth, Jean!' (laughs) when I was being particularly obnoxious.

What sort of person was your mother, Kym? I have memories of her.

She was a lovely lady. The story I like to tell about her, we had a rather reprobate gardener-*cum*-chauffeur called Charlie Slattery. Mother never drove, and Slattery had a great taste for the grog, and there were a few unnerving drives that she had that eventually caused his removal from his position. I remember one day he was cleaning the windows of the upstairs bedrooms and he fell off the ladder and crashed through a camellia bush onto the ground, didn't suffer any injury. But anyway, after a particularly horrendous occasion, my father dispensed with Slattery's service, and he, poor fellow, used to come ringing our front doorbell on odd occasions, desperate for a feed or a few coins or something like that, and Mother would always oblige him. And he would say, without fail, 'You're an angel from Heaven, Lady Bonython.' And when my mother had her ashes scattered under her favourite tree at our house at Mount Lofty I thought that would have been nice to have put on the plaque where her ashes now lie. But she was, everyone seemed to love her.

There is a story I tell now that indicates her rather wicked sense of humour. One of her many roles – I forget how many, she did tell me, something like thirty-something committees she was on – but one of her roles was President of the South Australian Orchestral Subscribers' Committee for the ABC¹. Whenever there was a visiting

¹ ABC – Australian Broadcasting (then) Commission.

musical celebrity they would hold a cocktail party at the ABC, and it was Mother's role to introduce the guest of honour to members. On the occasion of the visit of Sir Malcolm Sargent, she probably horrified the ladies by saying that, in order to get some background on Sir Malcolm, she'd looked him up in *Who's Who* and was surprised to find he had eight inches! Now, earlier this year, when Katherine Hepburn died, there was a two-page spread in *The Advertiser* of Katherine Hepburn's visit to Adelaide in 1954, and one of the several photographs reproduced was one headed, 'Shocked society matrons'. They were unnamed, but one of them was very definitely my mother. And I was contemplating writing a letter telling the story about Malcolm Sargent and saying that, 'I can assure readers that my mother wouldn't have been in the least shocked by Katherine Hepburn wearing men's pants in Hindley Street, which caused quite a stir at the time!' (laughter) So she did have a wicked sense of humour, and I thank her – she took me to the Theatre Royal to see Pavlova when I was only six or seven, and I saw so many of the great musicians, like Walter Gieseking, who visited Adelaide.

She, unlike her contemporaries, appreciated the newer trends in art. I mean, she was one of the first patrons of Jeffrey Smart and Louis James, you know, at a time when her contemporaries were more interested in traditional art. She started me looking at people who were subsequently to be some of the artists who persuaded me to open a gallery – people like Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd and Robert Dickerson – you know, all those people were far more *avant garde* than the sort of art that other people in her circle collected, and in her latter years she did say that my taste had left hers behind. (laughs) And I was considered, in those days, something of an *avant garde* connoisseur, but nowadays I'm afraid I'm back in the fuddy-duddy, because there's not a lot of – there's some, but there's not a lot of artists' work that turns me on today. But, as I say, with my jazz tastes, as the giants of jazz – like Ellington and Basie and so on – have died off, in my blinkered opinion they're not being replaced by people of equal stature. I mean, the best-known jazzman today probably is the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis: now, I'll grant him he's a fantastic technician, but I'm a bit dubious about his improvisational skill. I did see an intriguing documentary on television a couple of years ago of him – I can't think, it was Leontine Price – he was just playing obligatos behind a famous opera singer and that was wonderful, but as

far as him being a jazz man, I just have my reservations of whether he's in the same category as, you know, the Jack Teagardens and the Benny Goodmans and the — —.

Perhaps it's passion, Kym.

Yes, maybe.

Maybe.

But it just doesn't seem to quite have the warmth. One of the wisest and nicest people that jazz has put me in touch with was Dave Brubeck, and on one of my last visits — I brought him out to Australia several times, but on one of my last contacts with him he said, 'Jazz is about going out on stage and taking chances. If you want to hear perfect music, listen to the classics.' Now, what he was (sound of mobile telephone interference) meaning was that the basis in our opinion of jazz is improvisation, and it can be an exciting experience or, if the musicians don't 'gel', it can be mournful; whereas if you go to a concert of a classical pianist you'll hear it played tonight the same way as it was played the last night and fifty years ago. You can be sure that you're going to like what you hear, whereas there is that element of doubt that makes jazz something special.

Kym, did you ever discover how your mother, Jean, had gained her love of the arts and music?

No, I don't, I can't say I do. Her mother was a Downer — we're sort of distantly related to — Alexander Downer's father, Alec Downer, was a cousin, I think, of my mother's, and I think they were a fairly artistic family. But I don't think there was — I'm not aware of any great artistic inclinations on the Bonython side. I mean, my grandfather bought fairly safe, traditional landscape paintings, but he wasn't an art collector as such. And so I, rightly or wrongly, have the feeling that my artistic tastes were shaped by my mother's side of the family.

Now, Kym, as a young man in the '30s growing up with this love of jazz, what else were you into at the time? I do recall you mentioned wrestling.

Yes. (laughter) Well, one of my first loves, of course, was, like all my generation, speed was the thing. I mean, when I was at junior school we were asked to name the three greatest men the world has ever known, and number one on my list was Sir Henry Seagrave, who was the world speed record holder at the time. Jesus Christ I put in second, and third I put in Dr Gunson, who lived —

Oh, yes!

– next door. So I had my priorities set from an early age. So that speed was always with me, particularly I was born at about – not long before the speedway became – speedway was, I think, invented in Australia about 1926, so that by the late '20s they were having, every Saturday night in the summer, meetings at Wayville. And my father's secretary at *The Advertiser* was a Miss Litchfield, and her brother, Keith Litchfield, had an engineering company on Kensington Road, and I used to – my mother took me to the speedway one night, but that was enough for her, and thereafter I used to go every Saturday night with the Litchfield family, and I continued to go once it moved from Wayville to Camden. By then I had a motorbike of my own and I used to ride down from Mount Lofty to go to Camden on Saturday nights.

So the Camden Speedway, was that out Kilburn way?

No, no, no, that was opposite Morphetville Racecourse.

Morphetville Racecourse, of course it was!

Yes. Well, then they went to Kilburn –

Kilburn –

– after the –

– that's correct.

– after the War.

Yes.

And at one stage Kilburn and Rowley Park were running simultaneously. But I'm not sure why it moved from Kilburn, but my recollection was that there was a soccer fanatic by the name of Rowley who owned the pughole that Rowley Park was situated in, and he gave this pughole to the Soccer Association, of which he was an enthusiast. But because of its low-lying nature – it was in like a pit – the time when they wanted to play soccer it was often a lake, so they sought an alternative place to play soccer at Hindmarsh and then made income to pay for the rent of the Hindmarsh thing by leasing it to people like myself to run speedway. And although it looked like hell in the daytime, more than any other track in Australia, the people were right on

top of the action. I mean, they've got all the facilities and everything out at Virginia now, but it's all a bit more remote, whereas in Rowley Park the people were actually standing on terraced banks. They were very close – too close sometimes, because they'd get covered in mud and – – –.

I do recall that, one of the times I went there, getting completely covered in mud!

Yes, well then, you see, 'Oh, there's a nice open space.' Then it was that, after the first vehicles had gone past, they've discovered why it was open, because they'd get showered with wet mud. (laughter) But it did bring an exciting element of personal involvement, which a more traditional speedway lacked.

Now, Keith, was he the 'flying flea' man, is that right?

Yes, that's right. There were many times when – well, a number of times – when I'd, Sunday mornings, I'd go out to near Parafield where he'd try to get this thing off the ground, without success. But yes, he was.

So, Kym, were the 1930s in Adelaide, for a youth like you, a very exciting time, or fulfilling time?

I think it was an exciting period. I mean, you know, one always looks back on their era as being the golden age of whatever. But I really do believe that speedway had a quality it no longer has today, and I blame, rightly or wrongly, a lot of that on the coming of sponsorship, because unless you've got a wealthy sponsor, these days you can't afford to – if you blow up your engine, to put another engine in it might cost you a hundred thousand, so it's got rid of the characters, the backyard mechanics, the Gelnite Jack Murrays, the people who used to be the backbone of speedway. All the drivers nowadays are businessmen and rely on deep-pocketed sponsors. I mean, when you were competing in the old days, you liked to think that you had a chance of running a place now and then, even just occasionally. But today it's the man with the wealth, who's sponsored, that's going to win every time, and the person with little or no sponsorship's going to run last every time.

Kym, while we're talking about cars, just coming back to the '30s, would you have got your licence pretty much at sixteen, straight off?

Well, what actually happened – (laughs) it's a funny story – my grandfather, who was a great enthusiast for scholastic success, made a rash promise to me in 1935, I think it was, that if I came top of my class at St Peter's, he would give me what I wanted, you

see. And it was a pretty safe bet to make, because (laughs) I hadn't shown much form as a scholar up to that point. And by some amazing fluke I did come top of my class – in fact, I even won the prize for Scripture, which, as I say, is something of classic unlikelihood. So anyway, came the end of the year, Grandfather invited me to come over and he'd give me my reward for coming top of the class, and I was somewhat crestfallen when he produced a stainless steel Big Ben pocket watch, not on a gold chain but on a black bootlace, (laughs) because what I wanted wasn't a pocket watch, it was a motorbike. And by almost blackmailing my father I got my first motorbike, a 175cc Triumph motorbike, from Len Ross in Pulteney Street, and that started my association with what consider to be one of the greatest pleasures of life, motorcycling. I rode a motorbike from the time I was fifteen until I reluctantly sold my last motorbike last year, by which time I was eighty-three, and I was never without a motorbike from 1935 to 1983 [*sic*]. And my whole life has changed for the worse since I've been deprived of my motorbike, because in my old age I had so many remarkable escapes from accidents and things, and people used to constantly say, 'You'll be sorry,' and I'm afraid by the time I was in my late seventies, early eighties, their prophecies would come true. I've been forced to wear a leg brace for the last few years and I've got a disabled car parking permit, but even with that I find that one has to often walk a block or two to get where you want to, whereas with a motorbike, weather permitting, you can generally drive right to the door and park right there, which you can't do, even with a disabled permit.

Am I right in saying that you had an Amil car at one stage?

Yes, that was my first car. My brother got one of the first MGs, and there was a fellow – I can't think of his Christian name – McCallum, had a motorcar workshop in Pirie Street, down near where the Boy Scouts are now, and that was sort of one of the centres of motor racing. He had a couple of racers from Sydney working there. And anyway, McCallum had this rather quaint two-seater Amil car, which was almost identical to the one that Jacques Tati had in his film, *Monsieur Hulot's holiday*. And it was a two-seater, but it was even more decrepit than the Jacques Tati car. It had a flattened aluminium bonnet that was held on by two crossed straps, a three-ply pointed tail which I used to paint a different colour almost weekly, (laughter) and a sponge rubber seat. At one stage a previous owner, called Pompey Pedersen, as I

recall, held some sort of a speed record for Adelaide to Victor Harbor – I don't know what it was. But it was a quaint vehicle, and it was my introduction to motorcars. It had, I remember it had a rather flimsy metal bracket between the headlights on which was mounted a small, raucous electric motor horn, and one day I was taking my girlfriend home in the early hours of the morning and this blasted horn started to blow and I didn't know – I was never a mechanic, and in the end, in desperation, I grabbed hold of the horn, trying to tear the wires off, and the whole bracket came off and the horn kept blowing, shortly followed by an irate father coming out! And that was the end of that particular relationship. (laughter)

But I went from that Amil car to a *huge* Amil car. I can't remember what the model was, but I know it had quite a – it was a four-seater and it had quite a big space between the back of the front seat and the rear seat. And I remember driving down Rundle Street one Saturday morning with my then friend, Bryan Monk, who later changed his name to Monkton, but he was putting a golfball around, (laughs) standing in the back of the car, as we drove down Rundle Street one Saturday morning.

Oh, goodness me!

And I guess I must have had that car almost about the time the War started, yes.

So, Kym, with your love of speed and music, how did you come to go to wrestling, in those teenage years?

Oh, I don't know, I used to go to a gymnasium, Fred Habib –

Oh, yes.

– had a gymnasium and I used to go there, and I met some of the wrestlers, and there was one Greek wrestler who – we sort of struck a chord. Leo Demetril, his name was, and he and Tiger Higgins and Billy Meeske and Whitman – I can't think of his name – Hughie Whitman –

Ah, yes.

– were some of the characters of the day, and I remember going out once, on one of my trips to try and see Keith Litchfield get his Flying Flea off the ground and I took Leo Demetril on the back of the, the pillion seat of my little motorbike, (laughs) and he was a giant of a guy. But no, my own children by my second marriage, I used to

take them to the Thebarton Town Hall where they used to have regular wrestling matches and they were, you know – no doubt it was all phoney, but sometimes, when they had the wrestling in the City Baths, Tiger Higgins and Billy Meeske were traditional foes, and I remember one night one hit the other over the head with the enamel spittoon, and you could hear the – bong! – you know, he really did hit him.

Oh, there was another one of the tough men was Bob King, who was a New Zealander by birth, and he knew, he was – on stage he and Demetril had a spiteful – –
–. The mere fact that King knew that I was a friend of Demetril, every time I'd maybe pass him in the street he'd lunge and snarl at me. And then, years later, when I had an art gallery in Sydney, Bob King had moved to Sydney and he was a sort of a handyman working for Sir Russell Drysdale, and there were a couple of occasions when I was having trouble getting money from clients who hadn't paid for their pictures that they'd bought and I took Bob King along with me. (laughter) But it didn't do any good, I still didn't get the money! But Bob King by then had assumed a more gentle persona and he wasn't the snarling villain that he had been in the ring in his wrestling days.

Kym, I was quite surprised, a few months ago, to find that RM, Reg, Williams was also a great wrestling fan.

Was he really?

Yes. And was a mate of Hughie Whitman's, I think. Quite surprised me, I wouldn't have thought the two went together, and yet he was.

No, no.

And he was also a bit involved out at that Kilburn Speedway, with some chariot-style stuff he did.

Yes. Well, one of the characters I always recall was Bill Hamley-Clark.

Oh, yes.

He was – we had a system when we – I put on the first so-called 'Demolition Derby' in Australia, where every vehicle tried to write off every other vehicle by any means possible. In America you could buy an old bomb from a car park for five or ten dollars, you know, but here they were much more safety conscious, and the controlling body, the Racing Drivers' Association, made them weld the doors shut and put roll bars inside, you know, whereas half the pleasure of the American Demo

Derby, the cars would hit, the doors would fly open, next car come along would tear the door off. But because of the regulations enforced by the RDA, by the time they got them to an acceptable condition they had not five or ten dollars involved, they probably had a couple of hundred dollars, and the drivers were, not unnaturally, a bit more reluctant about writing their cars off. Well, Hamley-Clark thought – we used to pay them ten pounds for every car that entered, and Hamley-Clark thought he'd beat that racket. So he put on – I think he put ten cars at ten pounds each, and every one of them got wrecked! (laughter) So it didn't really work. And Hamley-Clark was one of those – oh, there were so many stories. The one I liked best was he used to fancy himself as the best marksman in Australia, and there was one occasion he used to tell when he was up in Central Australia, and there was a plague of camels. And he was down the bottom of a hill and a camel's head appeared over the horizon and he took aim and fired a shot and the camel disappeared, and the next minute it's back there again. And he did this five times, and he thought, 'God,' you know, for someone who reckoned he could hit a sixpence at two hundred yards he couldn't believe it – he must be slipping. And then the head never reappeared again, so he climbed [to] the top of the hill and looked down, there were five dead camels! (laughter) Typical Hamley-Clark story!

He had the gun shop in Rundle Street East, didn't he?

Yes, that's right. Yes, I went to his funeral a year or so ago.

Kym, the late 1930s in Adelaide, as people in the community felt that push to war, did you feel it incumbent on you to join up immediately war was declared, or was – –?

Yes, I did. Well, this is what – I'm quite friendly with Tony Abbott, because we were on the same side of the 'No Republic' debate, and I happened to be at a meeting in Brisbane, by which time Tony had become a politician. And I said, 'When are you politicians going to start talking about National Service?' I said, 'We were lucky last time, because from the time the war was declared in September '39 until the Japanese started bombing us at the beginning of '42, we had a bit of time to get our act together. We're completely – well, virtually completely unprepared now. We're not going to be given two years to do something about it in these modern times. Things have got to be done in minutes or hours, not years.' And I felt that all Australians ought to have a basic knowledge of protecting their country and, besides which, I'm

convinced that National Service is good for discipline, it makes you meet and understand the points of view of people otherwise you would never meet, it gives you an opportunity to learn some skills which you can put to use. Because in those days, you know, all the schools had cadet corps, it was the regular thing for when you left school you joined the militia, we used to go down to the Parade grounds every Monday night and drill and go to Woodside camp. And if there is another occasion, God forbid, when our country's threatened, I think we're hopelessly unprepared for it. So it was the tradition of my generation, anyway, to have some basic understanding of protecting ourselves and our country. And Tony Abbott, to my chagrin, his response [was], 'Well, we can't afford it.' And I said, 'Well, what about all the money you're paying for dole? That would go a long way towards the costs of having a militia.' But an Army friend of mine said, 'The trouble is that nowadays Australians don't want to be put in a position of being somewhere where they don't want to be,' so that that's one of the – the Army doesn't want them because they know the people that they'd get don't want to be there. But I think it's our duty to have some positive attitude towards defending our country rather than saying, 'Oh, well, we're not ready, let them walk in.'

And, Kym, were there a group of you who joined up at the same time?

Oh, I think most of the – I was in the 10th Battalion militia and I think most of my contemporaries joined. I decided, 'Well, if there's going to be a war I don't want to be in any trenches,' and I thought, 'If I'm going to volunteer, I'm going to volunteer for the Air Force, not as a soldier.' And my whole life – maybe everyone's life – but my whole life has been marked by curious circumstances that have potentially changed what happened. I mean, the fact was I signed up, I think, in October '39 and I was then working for an accountancy firm in Currie Street. I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I left school, and my brother John, who went on to become head of Santos, said, 'Whatever you do in life, you'll find a knowledge of accountancy will stand you in good stead.' So I was doing a correspondence course with Hemingway Robinson and working as a sort of a, I don't know, clerk at JF Key Reid and Company, which was an accountancy firm in the Steamship Building in Currie Street. And so after I volunteered I left the accountancy, waiting to be called up. And I went to see a friend of mine, the one who was putting the golfball around

the back of the Amil car, he became a professional aviator and was a flying instructor at the New South Wales Aero Club at Mascot. I went up and stayed with him for a week and he said, 'Well, when you're driving back to Adelaide and going through Melbourne, go to Victoria Barracks and look up a fellow called Davis and ask him how long before you'll be called up.' So I did that, and Davis was very cordial and he said, 'Oh, it'll be a while yet before the Empire Air Scheme is ready to go, it'll probably be two or three months before you'll be called up.' And he said, 'Just a minute,' and he went out of the room and he came back and he said, 'Can you be in Sydney tomorrow?' And I said, 'Oh, I suppose, yeah.' So what I did was I then turned around and went back to Sydney and started on what was to be the last so-called 'cadet' course before the Empire Air Scheme started. And if I had waited ---.

What had happened was – and I didn't learn this until a few years ago, I was dining at the Rose Bay Golf Club with friends and the well-known air ace of World War Two, Clive 'Killer' Caldwell came over. I didn't know him, but he said, 'Do you know, I was the person that you replaced on that first course?' And for some reason or other he made himself unavailable and they needed a replacement to fill his place on this course that was about to start, and I just happened to come along at a time when they were thinking, 'Well, who are we going to get to fill his place?' So, if I'd waited for time to take its course, I probably would have not trained in Australia, I would have gone to Canada and done my training there and then from there to Britain, and who knows, we had a lot of casualties on the course that I was on, but it might have been a different outcome entirely had I gone to Canada and then to Europe.

Kym, where did your training take place, then, in Sydney?

Well, I did my elementary training, as it was called, at Mascot, and of course things ain't what they used to be. Then we were taking off, we pupils were taking off and landing, with commercial airliners taking off and landing alongside us. And it was just a grassy, undulating paddock – no runways and things like that. But you can't imagine them letting today's planes being mixed up with pupils. I mean, one of the incidents that will always stick in my mind – you know, this was before the days when parachutes were readily available – and one of the instructors was training his

pupils in aerobatics, and the instructor had forgotten to do up his safety harness and at the top of a loop he fell out of the plane, landed in the main street of Randwick, and the pupil, who'd yet to go solo, (laughs) had to get back, which he succeeded in doing, but it must have been a bit unnerving to see –

Oh! I reckon.

– your instructor falling out of the plane.

What were your training aircraft, Kym?

My friend Bryan Monkton was Chief Flying Instructor of the New South Wales Aero Club, and they were flying Tiger Moths. I never, in my Air Force career, flew a Tiger Moth. We were in what was called the Kingsford Smith Flying Club, which was in another hangar on the same aerodrome, and they were De Havilland 60s, which were a sort of earlier model, not as up-to-date as the Tiger Moth. But that's what I did my elementary training [on]. And because things were just getting going, it was a much longer course. I think we were there for three or four months or something, whereas in later years it might have been half that time. And then I went – – –.

Kym, I'll just change the tape, excuse me.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

– – – night there was a car broken down somewhere out of Albury, and I stopped to offer assistance changing a tyre for this woman who turned out to be a gypsy, and in thanks she said she'd tell my fortune. And she told me that she could see I was going to be killed in an aeroplane in March. (laughs) And there were a few opportunities in Marches that followed thereafter when it could so easily have happened, although I didn't really believe it. I used to say that I always was a bit relieved when April came round and I'd survived another March! Although the last one was perhaps the most frightening of all. I went to a jazz festival in Florida a couple of years ago, and flying from Florida to Los Angeles I had an empty seat beside me, and after the plane had taken off a rather sinister black-robed gentleman with a long beard and rather wild eyes said, 'Is anyone sitting here?' And I said, 'No.' So he went back to his seat further back and came back with his hand luggage, which he stashed under his feet, and pulled out a book with 'Taliban' written on it, and he had all sorts of nervous

twitches! And I thought, ‘Christ, what have I got here!’ And before long he got up and went into the toilet, and he was in there for half an hour or more, and I thought, ‘This bastard’s putting a bomb together in there.’ And I swear, I don’t know – a whirring sound started in amongst his hand luggage, and (laughs) I thought, ‘We’re going to all die.’ I was relieved when we got to Los Angeles intact, because I thought I had a terrorist sitting next to me!

But, Kym, just tell me about those war years for you. After your training at Mascot, where did you head off to?

Well, I went on to do my intermediate training at Point Cook and – – –. You see, what happened with that course – as I say, it was the last of the cadet courses – the graduates either were made instructors or else they were, like me, posted to operational squadrons around Australia, whose main duty was to escort troop convoys and things like that. And so that’s what I did, I was transferred from Point Cook just before Christmas in 1940. I did a navigation course and a few other things like that, you know, and then I was posted to a Lockheed Hudson squadron, number 2 Squadron, at Laverton, which is just a few miles from Point Cook. The CO of our squadron in that period was Wing Commander Freddie Thomas, who went on to become Lord Mayor of Melbourne in post-war years. He was in the flour milling business, from memory. And there were a number of South Australians, one was Rob Burns-Cumming, there was a Fred Robilliard, Bob Law Smith, who was Chairman of TAA² in their latter years.

So who was the Fred, Fred – – –?

Freddie Thomas.

No, the other one.

Robilliard.

Robilliard, was it?

Yes. I went to a book launch a few months ago on the Robilliard brothers, they were quite a famous – well, well-known South Australian family who had been involved with the early flying. But a number of those people went on to make names for

² TAA – Trans-Australia Airlines.

themselves in war, and some, like Law Smith, in post-war business affairs; others, like Bill White, were left behind at Ambon and beheaded by the Japanese. Burns Cumming crashed at Kupang, where I was based, and all aboard were killed. At the time of Pearl Harbour I was just a second pilot, and we were heading north to Kupang and got to Oodnadatta and heard about the Pearl Harbour bombing, and we staged through Darwin onto Kupang. Other units of our squadron when to Ambon. There was another squadron already based in Darwin on Hudsons, which was 13 Squadron, they'd been there some – I'm not sure how long – months or years. And with the horrendous casualties and aircraft destroyed either in combat or on the ground, the two squadrons sort of combined and they had one commanding officer and we were both utilising each other's planes and maintenance staff and things like that, and it became a bit confused at who was a 2 Squadron person or who was a 13 Squadron person. I did an interview only a week ago in connection with Phil Brooks, who was the elder son of the Headmaster of the preparatory school at St Peter's, and he was a Hudson pilot. And his son, Tony Brooks – do you know him?

I know who you mean, yes.

They're doing some sort of a documentary, I think on Ambon. And anyway, I came back from an operation – that's what I was going to say, yes. At that point I was promoted to be captain of my own aircraft, and one of the people that was posted to my crew was quite a senior wireless air gunner called George Wyburd, and he was a bit miffed that he should be ordered to fly with a rookie like me instead of an established pilot like Rob Burns Cumming. But, as luck had it, had he been with Burns Cumming he would have been amongst the people killed that day when the plane crashed taking off from Kupang with personnel and supplies for their other flight base at a place called Namlea. So, as I say, it saved Wyburd's life by a stroke of fortune. I got another South Australian was posted to my crew as an air gunner called Trevor Menzies.

Oh, yes.

And he died only a year or so ago, and his family asked if I would write something to be read at the funeral. And I said that I'd met Menzies when I was training in the Torpedo Training Unit at Nowra, Menzies joined me. And the other air gunner was another South Australian called John Schofield. Schofield came from South

Australia, his wife – McLoughlin, I think her name was – the family lived at Mannum, and the war had only just ended and he was up at Mannum with his wife and the dog fell into the river and got into trouble, so Schofield dived in to rescue the dog and drowned himself. Anyway, years after that – it was the most horrendous funeral I’ve been to. The widow threw herself into the grave on top of the coffin, you know?

This is Schofield’s funeral?

Yes.

Oh, dear.

Menzies said to me, he said, ‘Did you ever wonder how Schofield and I came to be members of your crew? I said, ‘No, I’ve never even thought about it. I sort of thought to myself, well, maybe I had a reasonable reputation as a pilot.’ He said, ‘No,’ he said, ‘listen, the CO called for volunteers for your crew and nobody volunteered. So,’ he said, ‘I said to Schofield, “Listen, with a name like that, there’s no way he’s not going to survive this war. Let’s volunteer.”’ So I said, ‘Well, thanks for telling me. I thought it was because I was a’ –

And these were your mates!

– ‘reasonable pilot, not because I was a bloody Bonython!’ (laughter) So I told this in the little bit I wrote for his funeral, [about] what good friends we’d been, but I’d never known the basis of our first getting together was because of (laughs) some misplaced thought that being a Bonython they’d be safer.

Kym, where did your service take you?

Well, what actually happened – I suppose I’d better give you this – in September ’41, when the prospect of a Pacific war was becoming more likely, we went on a so-called ‘familiarisation’ flight, we flew to Ambon, Namlea and Kupang, and areas which subsequently we would operate from on a wartime basis. We had to wear, we weren’t allowed to wear Air Force uniforms, we had to go as civilians while we were walking around the town, so that when the war started, as I say, we went on up to those Netherlands East Indies bases and operated out of there. Now, at one stage, I was return – we had to, whenever the plane needed any major servicing, we had to fly back from there to Darwin, where they had the facilities. So I was flying back to

Kupang from Darwin one January afternoon and I got a wireless message that Penfohe, which was the name of the Kupang airfield, was under enemy attack, and not to attempt to land, instead to land on what had been marked as an emergency landing area at a place called Mena, M-E-N-A, River, which was in the south-west tip of the island of Timor. So it was a vast, open space and I did what I thought would be a reasonable landing, only I didn't realise the grass was about six feet tall, (laughs) so, instead of being a nice, smooth landing, there was a terrible thump as we (claps hands) sank that last six feet. And how lucky we were! Because on examination I found that, in amongst that tall grass, there were quite a few sort of mud wallowing places where the buffalo, water buffalo, they used to sort of roll there, and if I'd hit one of those things it would have been disaster. But by a stroke of good fortune I didn't strike any of those. And we were there, and they rather foolishly insisted that we make hourly contact by radio with headquarters, and I'm convinced that the Japanese picked up our radio signals because, come dawn the next day, the Japanese fighters were there and, although we'd camouflaged our plane with branches and things, they still found it out and set the plane on fire. Fortunately I'd already removed my gramophone records and a tin of my mother's favourite shortbread, so those things survived.

And anyway, there we were with the plane destroyed. And they dropped messages saying, 'Stay there, we're sending another plane to pick you up in the next day,' and nothing ever came. And then they dropped a message saying to go to the beach nearby because they were going to land off an American destroyer called the *Peary*, P-E-A-R-Y, some supplies of aviation fuel for the American Kittyhawks, and that in actual fact never arrived, but we had to – they guided these several bundles of 44-gallon drums tied together, I think four or five lots, and we had to sort of drag them ashore and put them up above the high water mark for future intended use for the American Air Force. And so there we were, with – – –. Oh, the longboat from the American warship got overturned in the surf, and we suddenly found we had a couple of American sailors joined our motley crew waiting to be picked up. Nothing happened, and then one of the American sailors was frigging around with his revolver and it went off and shot his thumb off or something, so as the senior – I was only a flying officer, but as the senior officer present I said, 'That's enough. We're going to head for home through the bush.' The locals, it was such a godforsaken spot, full of

all sorts of biting things, and we decided we'd walk through to the hills where the – the natives lived up in the hills, they didn't live down there where they were devoured by all these things – we'd walk back to at least somewhere where we could get by telephone contact back to base. And this was where I said one of the sayings of the war was uttered by one of these American sailors, who was a toughened bosun from the *Peary*. We were sitting disconsolately one night in this home-made humpy we'd built out of palm leaves and things with the rain pouring down, sitting in mud and being eaten by mosquitoes, and this bosun said, 'Say,' he said, 'you may think these here moskeeters are big,' he said, 'up in the Philip-pines, man,' he said, 'them moskeeters are so big they can stand on their flat feet and fuck a turkey.' (laughter) Which I said was one of the sayings of the war for me! But anyway, we did get back, there was the oft-told thing, when we got – the first night we got to a native village in the hills, and I had my wind-up gramophone and records, and I pulled out Benny Goodman's *Sing sing sing* and put that on, and the locals were absolutely fascinated by this and they got their gamelan band out and started to play and I, being a very amateurish amateur drummer, joined in playing the drums with their gamelan band. (laughs) But anyway, we did eventually get to somewhere where we were able to make telephone contact with the base and they sent a truck to pick us up and take us the rest of the way.

Now, I don't remember – unfortunately I lost my logbook in the Ash Wednesday fires, so I haven't got any way of checking the date that we got back to Kopang, but I think we were – I have a feeling we were there for a week or so. And the Japanese used to come over and shoot the place up with monotonous precision, and we had virtually no airport defence, a few AIF³ machine guns that had very little vertical leverage on their gun, so the Japanese showed their disdain by one of them actually running its wheels along the runway and doing a wide turn in the middle, where the runways joined, with the guns firing and then taking off again.

But we were evacuated. There was a book written, I've got it here, and the guy who wrote it's dead now, so I don't know – I always suspected that I was the unnamed person. The CO called for volunteers, for people to stay behind, and they said, 'Everyone except one person volunteered.' And I think I was that one person,

³ AIF – Australian Imperial Forces.

because the CO had said to me, ‘Now, I want you as a pilot, I don’t want you to volunteer.’ So I was the one who didn’t. My second pilot was one who did stay there, and he died of dysentery a few months or weeks later. But whether Col Humphreys was referring to me I don’t know, but I was acting under orders from the CO not to. But anyway, we got out of Kopang, I think it was the night, the day before the Darwin raid.

I’d picked up dengue fever, one of those biting mosquitoes, I think, at this Mena River, and I went into the RAAF base hospital the night before the big raid. The next morning one of my Air Force mates came to visit me in hospital, and while we were sitting around magging we heard this drone of aircraft approaching and we jubilantly thought, ‘Ah! Thank goodness the Yanks are finally arriving.’ But then we heard another sound that by then was quite familiar, the whistling of falling bombs, and we realised that it wasn’t the Yanks at all, it was the enemy. So there were slit trenches around the hospital and I was a terrified participant in that first day of raids. In 1992 I was opening an art exhibition in Melbourne Street, North Adelaide, on February 19, 1992, and I said, ‘Fifty years ago today I was petrified at the bottom of a slit trench with bombs going off all around me.’ I said, ‘If I’d known I’d be around fifty years later opening an art show in Adelaide I might have lived my life a little more recklessly.’ (laughter) But it didn’t look too good, I can tell you.

This was in Darwin?

This was in Darwin. In Adelaide fifty years later was the art show, but that was the anniversary of –

Of the Darwin raid.

– the first Darwin raid, yes.

It must have been extraordinarily petrifying.

Well, I mean, everyone was convinced, as I supposed they were in England, that the enemy was going to land. We thought that (sound of mobile telephone interference) there’d be a, the raids would be the prelude to a land invasion the next day, and there was a great apprehension that, come the dawn, we’d be facing a ground invasion, but which never eventuated, just as the German invasion didn’t eventuate in England. But things did look pretty grim, because not only had we lost a lot of our crews, but a

lot of the aircraft were destroyed and there was no – there were a few isolated American Kittyhawks that tried to take off during the raid and were shot out of the sky before their undercarriages were even retracted, so that it was a pretty one-sided contest, there wasn't a great deal of opposition to the Japanese attackers. And their aiming capacity, particularly when they came back at midday to concentrate on the RAAF base, you know, it was spot-on, the first bombs fell just inside the boundary fence and the last ones fell just inside the other boundary fence. It was pinpoint accurate bombing, and it did a lot of damage. And I remember, on the day of the raid, we could see people streaming past the boundaries heading south, and our CO of the area was a Group Captain Scherger, who later became the head of TAA, he called all the aircrew together and said, 'Now, look,' he said, 'we can see a lot of service people running southwards,' he said. 'Now, I expect you aircrew to set an example by standing firm.' And we did. And I must admit, things looked pretty grim at nine o'clock that night. By lantern light they buried the RAAF personnel who'd been killed in the bombing raid, just wrapped in blankets, and things didn't look too bright for (laughs) the next twenty-four hours for a young guy that was petrified by the bombing, and the future didn't look bright. But anyway – – –.

Did you stay in Hudsons after that time?

Yes, yes, I stayed – this was the 19th February. I stayed with the squadron until middle of June, I think it was. At one stage they took us down to – we operated out of Daly Waters, which was –

Oh, yes?

– but it was so impractical, I mean, it was – not only was it a couple of hundred miles south, but everything was dispersed: the aeroplanes were over here, the living quarters were over there, it was quite impractical, and so they moved back to Darwin. But I left, as I say, mid-June from memory. We went up there, of course, on 7th December, so that was like five, six months we were up there. And then I was posted to do a conversion course onto Beauforts, at Laverton again, and posted to number 100 Squadron, which was a Beaufort torpedo squadron. As soon as we'd done a training course at Nowra, which was only a few days, we flew up to Milne Bay, which was then under attack. My old militia battalion, the 10th Battalion, was amongst the Australian troops that were on the ground being attacked by the Japanese

land forces, and every night a squadron of Japanese warships would steam into Milne Bay and would bombard the ground forces. And so, on our arrival, the next day when the Japanese were sighted, we were ordered out to attack. That's a painting that was done by some Adelaide guy, it's a photo –

Oh, yes?

– I gave the original to the Aviation Museum in Port Adelaide. But we attacked those, a Japanese cruiser and a couple of destroyers, and although I don't think we hit anything they never again, the mere fact that there was a torpedo squadron there, they virtually abandoned their ground troops to their fate. And although we didn't, I don't believe, sink any of those ships, the mere fact that we were there caused them to cease that regular night attack by warships, so it had some permanent effect. It was almost one of the first reverses the Japanese had, where they had to leave their troops to fight their own way out.

So, Kym, this is in Beauforts at Milne Bay.

Yes.

Where was your actual base?

Well, at Milne Bay.

At Milne Bay?

Yes. And I stayed there till just before Christmas '42, which was, you might as well say, apart from a couple of weeks when I came down – I think, from memory, I got a week's leave or something like that – did the conversion course and the torpedo training course, so I'd virtually been a year, my first operational tour was a year. Then I was posted to the Torpedo Training School at Nowra and I eventually became Chief Flying Instructor of that course. And we moved, in the latter stages, from Nowra to Jervis Bay, until I was posted to Williamstown to do a conversion onto Mosquitoes.

And I was then posted back to Darwin, to a place called Coomalie Creek, flying photo reconnaissance, Mosquitoes – that's the plane – above the door. And they had no armament whatsoever, they had – what used to be guns and things were replaced by extra fuel tanks and camera equipment. And we flew generally at fifteen, eighteen thousand feet and photographed, but occasionally we were required to get down to

water level to get pictures of what was going on underneath the palm trees. I do fondly remember flying along at dot feet along the beaches of Bali and Lombok, with these Balinese beauties waving to us as we went past. And one of the stories I like to tell was – I went to Bali a few times in latter years, and one time we decided that we'd go also to Lombok, which was another island we used to cover photographically. And one of the Balinese cynics said, 'When the syphilisation of Bali is complete, the tourists will move on to Lombok.' At that time Lombok was not a tourist destination, there was one motel and it soon became apparent that the only other people visiting there were a group of Japanese who'd been stationed there during the war. And when it became known that I was one of the enemy, you know, well, the cameras came out and arms went around the shoulders, and somebody thrust a pint of beer in my hand, and as a lifetime teetotaller (laughter) I drank my first pint of beer because I knew there was no way I could get the message across that I didn't drink! But I kept in touch with a couple of them for years, until they died, that had been at Lombok, yes.

Just as an aside, Kym, how did your teetotalism come about? Was that just choice?

Well, my father and grandfather were both strict teetotallers. A few years ago somebody at the Adelaide University contacted me and a number of other people wanting me to nominate a – what's the word? – like a 'defining moment' of my life, and I ignored it – I thought I couldn't think of anything witty or interesting to say so I just ignored it. But they persisted. And I said, 'Well, look, the only thing I can say is, apart from the fact that I never acquired a taste for it, which was lucky – it didn't apply to chocolates and sweets (laughter) – but there used to be a church near us that had a saying of the week on a noticeboard, and one that stuck in my mind was, 'It's better to be neat and tidy than tight and needy.' So, whether that had any influence, whether that was a defining moment, I don't know. But the fact was, the occasions when we'd be out on operations out of Kupang and we'd come back, you know, dying of thirst, and there'd be frosted bottles of beer on the table, but you couldn't drink the water because they'd just boiled it, and I still couldn't bring myself to quench my thirst on beer, even though (laughs) I was dying for a drink. I just never acquired a taste for alcohol. And I suppose it was – I mean, my father used to say, 'Oh, you don't want to drink that stuff,' you know, and my brother always argued

vehemently that this was not the case, because my brother, for most of his young life, wasn't a drinker either. But he married Cynthia Young, whose father owned Romalo House, and it had a well-stocked cellar, and I used to say that – another of our father's sayings was, 'Waste not, want not,' and because Warren inherited a well-stocked cellar he became a wine connoisseur. As I say, he denies this emphatically, but that's the way it happened. He bought his father-in-law's house and couldn't see the wine going to waste, so he became not only a fancier but a self-proclaimed connoisseur of wine. But it's never appealed to me at all.

So, Kym, coming back to your war years, how did they end for you?

Well, I was actually on leave. My tour of duty went from September 1944 to July '45, and I think the normal tour of duty was about nine months. And I was on leave when the atom bomb was dropped, and so I decided to request discharge then, so that's why, in the last – my last days in the Air Force more or less coincided with the end of the war, and I've never flown a plane since then. I used to consider that I was a reasonable enough pilot, but I had no incentive – I mean, if I'd lived up, like my wife, at Wilcannia or somewhere, I would have had some justification to fly to Adelaide and stuff like that, but I really had no justification and I thought I'd been lucky so far and (laughs) I wouldn't trust my luck to survive another lifetime of – – –. I always used to say that during my career I'd crashed three aeroplanes, I've spent over a year on crutches when the hydroplane blew up, I've been gored in both legs by a Jersey bull, I've had a few narrow escapes with my scuba diving and I have a two-man submarine and countless miraculous escapes at Rowley Park and other tracks, I used to say that obviously the good Lord was saving up something particularly horrendous for me. And I said this for some years until this little old lady said, 'What, you mean like old age?' (laughter) I said, 'You're right, it's the most horrendous of all.'

So, Kym, after the war, how did it affect you, the time in the RAAF and losing mates and seeing what you saw?

Well, as I say, I could never quite reconcile the fact that I'd had so many seemingly miraculous escapes from a number of situations that I'd found myself in, and to a degree that may have had something to do with my enthusiasm to become a speedway driver, because I thought, 'Well, my mates have all gone doing their bit,

maybe I can push my luck a bit further and do a few dangerous things in my later life.'

But by the time the war ended I'd completely given up all ideas of completing my accountancy course, and my father had a sort of a hobby farm just out of Mount Barker at Wistow, a place called Unalla, and I used to go up there occasionally, stay the weekend up at the farm, and I decided that I'd go on the land. So I went to Unalla (sound of cellophane wrapping being broken and removed) and worked as sort of a farm hand with a manager that my father had running the place, and in – it must have been about March, March of '46, I started looking for a place of my own and I found this 640 acres of land at Mount Pleasant, which was about, from memory, I think about thirty-five miles north-east of Adelaide, and I started running fat lambs, which is what my father had on his Mount Barker property. But I became friendly with a local guy called Frank McCrow, who was a Jersey cattle enthusiast, and through Frank McCrow I decided to get involved with Jersey cattle and, with his encouragement and support, I started the basis of a Jersey herd. I went to the Sydney Show and bought a few cattle there, and then from there I went to Jersey Island and purchased a few cattle from Jersey, bulls and cows, and built what was then, must have been one of the most – what's the word? Spectacular? Well, unique, anyway – dairies anywhere in Australia. It had a – – –.

Where did you get the concept for that, with its tiling and suchlike?

I can't think where I got the concept of the cantilevered roof –

Yes, that's what I'm interested in.

– and all that, yes. I can't think who my architect was. John Chappell was later on, but – – –.

It was like some of the American stuff –

Yes.

– but it wasn't, though.

Yes. It may have been from some of the overseas cattle magazines that I got the idea. But it really wasn't dairy – I mean, Mount Pleasant had the reputation, rightly or wrongly, that the rainfall dropped off an inch for every mile east you went from Mount Pleasant, so that although it had a certain rainfall at Mount Pleasant if you got

over the hills towards Palmer the rainfall was considerably less. And we relied on irrigated pasture – we weren't on the water mains, of course, we put down bores, which we used to pump water up onto concrete tanks on the tops of some of the hills around us, and we irrigated quite an area of lucerne, which I used to supplement the grains and things that we used to feed. And it was really, you know, it was – – –. I look back with great pride and affection on what we achieved there, because it was a unique –

Oh yes, definitely.

– people used to come, dairy farmers used to come from far and wide. Although they had a rotary milking system in some places, which was a further improvement, we never got to that stage, but we had a hammer mill, which was a new concept I got from England, which turned grain into crushed feed, you know. And they had green lucerne, either to graze on, or – – –. I had, and still have, a terrible problem with hay fever, and I was only talking last night how they say we're going to have one of the worst hay fever seasons on record. The thing I discovered from tests was that I was allergic to the pollen from rye grass, which is a bit early yet, I wasn't bothered by wattle or anything like that. I do get it a bit from fluffy cats, but the rye grass was my – – –. And at the time, springtime, when I'd be baling hay I'd be actually sort of enveloped in a cloud of blue pollen from the hay I was baling, and I'd have to retire to my room with a wet cloth over my eyes. And I eventually found a particular tablet which, alas, is no longer made, called Tabersan, and whereas other tablets can send you to sleep, I found that with Tabersan I could keep the hay fever at bay without any side effects whatsoever, and I've yet to find a suitable replacement, so I suppose I'll be facing that again before long.

Just backtracking a tad, two questions: were you married when you went to Mount Pleasant?

Yes, I got married when I came back from Milne Bay. One of the stories I told in my book, my mother used to dabble with the ouija board – you know what those are?

Oh yes, yes.

And I remember she asked, 'Will Kym marry?' And it spelt 'madly, at an early age', and that proved to be right. I never – I'd had a million girlfriends but I'd never actually had sex with any of them, until I met this girl who was a signals operator up

in Townsville. Whenever we'd drop a torpedo we'd have to come back to Townsville to get a replacement, and I met this very attractive Sydney WAAAF⁴, who worked in the RAAF Signals Office in Townsville. And we had a passionate affair and I proposed to her on Magnetic Island off Townsville, and it was only the night before we married – I suppose I shouldn't say this, but she's dead now anyway – but the night before we married, she lived down at Balmoral in Sydney, and the first time I saw her out of uniform was the night before we married, and I thought then I'd made a mistake because she had such dreadful taste in clothes and things! (laughter) But anyway, she was a good, loyal wife.

And when we were down at Nowra there was one rather amusing incident. We had no telephone connected to the house we rented, and we had a little light observation plane, a Moth Minor, that the students used to drop torpedoes into the Jervis Bay harbour, you know, and we'd be observing this either from the target ship – they didn't have explosive heads on, of course – but we'd either observe the operations from the target ships or else from spotter planes such as this Moth Minor. And I used to, occasionally I'd, after the exercise was over, I'd fly back over our house in suburban Nowra until she came out in the backyard and I'd pull the throttle back and I'd yell out, 'I won't be home for dinner!' and then put the power on again. (laughter) And the other classic memory I have, it was a real country town, I remember going into – we had an alarming number of casualties at one stage, and one was never sure whether there was a structural failure with the aircraft. We did find that there were some planes had their control cables half sawn-through, so there was obviously a saboteur around. And my own navigator, who was an Adelaidean called Doug Thomas, was giving instruction on radar to one of the pupils, a very capable pilot, sergeant pilot, from Queensland who was one of the most outstanding pilots on the course. And they were just flying along and all of a sudden just went into a dive and they were all killed. Now, no-one ever found out what gave way, whether it was a structural failure or whether it was the saboteur or what. But there were a number of – we had an alarm, I don't remember the figures now, but something like twenty or thirty people were killed in a forty-eight hour period. And I remember going into a

⁴ WAAAF – Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force [member].

shop in Nowra and the old lady behind the counter said, ‘Ooh yes, you burn them out there, don’t you?’ You know, meaning the crashes and things. But no, it was – – –.

I suppose I was there for over a year, instructing in torpedoes, attacks and – – –. I mean, we started off, when we did our conversion course and the initial – the first torpedo that – there were two RAF people, and they used pushbikes to simulate the flights of planes coming in to attack. We didn’t quite – we did it with planes, but we never – the pushbike era was at the very start of that torpedo training era.

So, Kym, my other question I had, prior to your farming – and you answered the first one about your marriage – was – excuse me for asking this, but I’ve always wondered: you didn’t have paid occupation as an accountancy, so how did you actually set up the farm financially? Was that through family, or did you have to borrow? How did you do that?

I can’t remember. I suppose my father must have bought it. No, I probably inherited money from Grandfather, I think, so probably that’s how I did it, I think, because the grandchildren were – I forget how many there were, that shared in his estate. But it was quite a sizeable amount for its day. So no, I wouldn’t have borrowed it, it would have been money I inherited from my grandfather.

Because at that time it would have been – what you did at St Magnus was a huge effort, really.

Yes. But of course, as I was only saying last night, my neighbours, the Perrotts, are pretty shrewd investors but I’ve never been much of a businessman, and they buy houses, do them up and sell them at a great profit, but I’ve never been much good at that sort of thing. And what I did do was I put together an incredible, in retrospect, art collection. And there was a – can’t think of his name now – but there was a photographer in Adelaide who borrowed some money from me then he couldn’t pay me back, so he offered to photograph my then art collection. That was before I started collecting Brett Whiteleys and Fred Williamses and things, but I did have Drysdales and Nolans and Arthur Boyds and things like that. When I look at it now, you know, pictures that I bought for fifty and a hundred pounds, been two that have sold for one and a quarter million each. If I ever stopped to value what that original collection in 1950-odd, it would be astronomical. But, you know, I sold them to do what I wanted to do, like building a gallery in Sydney, and I sold them for what were reasonable, good prices for their day. I had the rare opportunity of putting the Mertz Collection together –

Yes.

– which must be the dream of every commercial gallery, to have somebody come along and say, ‘Buy me – – –.’ Well, he originally said, ‘Buy half a dozen pictures for my office,’ and finished up buying about a hundred and eighty. And he spent about three hundred thousand dollars putting that collection together, and when eventually it was sold at auction, it raised sixteen and a half million.

It’s incredible, isn’t it?

So that happens – it doesn’t even happen once in a lifetime, it was a remarkable opportunity that I was fortunate enough to be the right place at the right time.

Kym, just coming back to St Magnus for a minute, given that it was next to one of the grand pastoral properties of South Australia in Rosebank, with the flamingos and the zoo in their heyday and all that, you mentioned earlier that you had great pride in what you achieved there. Did you feel a great kinship with the land, and joy out of that?

I got a great pride out of – you know, they were such beautiful animals. The bulls, admittedly, were –

Real buggers!

– yes, they were unpredictable and lethal, but the cows were like pets, you know? If you went out into the paddock and you didn’t make a fuss of them they’d come over and give you a bump with their horns, just so that you’d turn around and display some – – –. And it was like having a whole flock of loving Alsatians, you know, they were all pets and friends and had personalities. And one could feel a justifiable sense of having created something beautiful and something that was productive as well. I suppose I feel guilty now that I drink ‘So Good’⁵, not milk, you know. And one of the rare occasions when I made the right decision was at the time I was concentrating on Jerseys, farmers were paid on the butterfat content. Soon after that, the more prolific, quantity-wise, Friesians, took over, but they were – to me they were giant, Neanderthal things, they weren’t the silky, cuddly Jersey cows. And, as I say, it was just fortunate that I decided to concentrate on my speedway entrepreneurial and concerts and things like that at a time when Jerseys ceased to occupy their dominant

⁵ ‘So Good’ is a soy-based milk substitute.

position of high butterfat-producing animals. It must be a – to go down to the Show now, there used to be rows and rows of Jerseys, now there's just a few, because that's not the basis on which milk is purchased these days.

No, but you still see those beautiful Jerseys and Guernseys, and the Illawarras still. But no, you're right, it's not the cow for today.

No.

Kym, the – look, I might just stop this tape, if that's all right, because it's got to be changed soon, if you'll excuse me a minute.

END OF DISK 2: DISK 3

ID, tape ID, this is tape 3 of an interview with Kym Bonython. Go, Kym.

Yes, we talked about Rosebank. Rosebank was owned by Robert Melrose, and he had a number of rare, white kangaroos, and they were quite a tourist attraction, and I started taking movies, 16mm movies, when I was about twelve or thirteen, and amongst my treasured films – all got burnt in the Ash Wednesday fire – were some of the celebrities that came up. And I remember I had one particular shot of my eldest child, Robyn, who – I suppose she would have been just a few months old at the time that Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh came up to look at the white kangaroos, and they went on to McBean's for a picnic lunch. But Laurence Olivier was nursing my daughter, Robyn, and Vivien Leigh was tickling her under the chin! And another lost opportunity, after the Ash Wednesday fire, I was invited – well, Julie and I were invited – to go to Canberra as, I think, the token – as not *the* token, but as token bushfire victims, at the time of Charles and Diana's –

Oh, yes?

– visit, and I had a film of her [Princess Diana's] father, who was aide at Government House, John Althorp, Government House in Adelaide, and I think it was Sir Willoughby Norrie or Sir Robert George, I can't remember which, came up to the farm and I had one shot of John Althorp reclining under the fruit trees of the orchard at St Magnus sort of sucking on a bit of straw. And after the dinner we were directed to sit at Diana's table at Government House, and I thereafter kicked myself that I never mentioned the fact that her father had visited me during his stay in Adelaide as an aide at Government House, and I never sort of said anything to her, and I thought, 'Why didn't I tell her that we used to know her father in his Adelaide days?

So, Kym, I know this is in the period that your first marriage comes to a close, towards the end of St Magnus, was it?

Yes. Well, I actually – I think we had the clearing sale at St Magnus in the spring of '55, I think it was, and we were, I think we were divorced about '53 or '54, something like that. It was one of those – – –. You know, in those days you had to be caught *in flagrante*, but it was all sort of organised by the private detective and his wife, wearing a coat, was under the blankets! (laughs) And a friend had to accompany the detective to witness this 'act of depravity', whereas in actual fact she was fully-dressed. Yes, well, so that was – – –.

So by that time, though, you would have been heavily into speedway, wouldn't you?

Yes, I was, yes. I also had a record shop in Bowman's Arcade for a while.

I remember that, yes.

Do you? And one of the things that was lost was a huge mural – luckily I've got the sketch for it over on the wall there – John Dowie did that on a very large scale on one of the walls of the record shop, and of course that went, was destroyed when they demolished Bowman's Arcade to build the monstrosity that now sits there.

John Mack was in Bowman's, too, wasn't he?

That's right, and Norton, the optician –

Yes, that's right.

– Clifford Norton. And they had Atwell's Clothing thing, they had this Aboriginal figure sitting in the window wearing a Pelaco shirt with the logo, 'Mine tinkit 'im fit.' (laughter) Yes, they were – – –. No, Cliff Norton, that's right, Cliff Norton. And Rob Norton, his son, was my optician in later years. But yes, they were – and there was the barber, can't think of his name, and a corset lady, all in Bowman's Arcade.

It was a beautiful little arcade.

Yes, yes.

So, Kym, it must have been fairly frantic for you in those years at St Magnus toing-and-froing with the speedway.

I was also playing in a jazz band.

Oh, yes?

And so that became a bit – they’ve only just issued a CD, and after we’ve finished I might just play you one track where Ralph Binns, the radio announcer, announcing my final performance with the group. So in retrospect it’s – because in the fire, all the acetates and things of broadcasts we made, which I had, were all destroyed; so after all these years I’ve got a CD now with some of the music that we made. I played with Dave Dallwitz Southern Jazz Group, a record that was actually voted number three, I think, of Australian records in that particular year. And there was another improvised blues which Dave called ‘The original stump jump blues in Hay Flat, composed by Massey Harris’. (laughter)

Sounds like him, too!

So anyway, yes, so there was the radio show – I started doing my radio thing in 1937, when I was still at school, and then after the war years I went back to the ABC. Clem Semmler, who finished up as Acting General Manager of the ABC, was a great jazz fanatic, and through Semmler my program resumed and became national and I used to get odd – I wouldn’t say ‘fan letters’, but one said that I ought to be banished to the middle of the Nullarbor Plain with instructions to earn a living selling alto saxophones to the Aborigines, (laughs) and (rumble of traffic) I got one from a seaman who heard the program in the China Sea. And actually, one of the stories, I went to Canberra to be awarded the Companion of the Order of Australia and I’d never met the then Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen. And I was queued up to be introduced and when eventually I was introduced to Lady Stephen her opening comment was, ‘My husband and I used to lie in bed every Friday night listening to your jazz program on the ABC.’ And I said, ‘Well, I must admit, Lady Stephen, I never imagined this would be our opening greeting tonight.’ (laughs)

Sir Ninian Stephen’s a good bloke, actually, very good bloke. So, Kym, this interest in jazz and speedway that just kept going, how did it flourish in the ’50s and ’60s – so I went into speedway particularly now – how did that flourish in Adelaide? Were there a group of you who promoted it, or just yourself?

No, no, I was – well, I was getting into the entrepreneurial thing. I mean, when I was a schoolboy I used to import records from a few famous record shops or one in particular, the Commodore Music Shop in New York, and I used to order records from them and they’d come out on the Mariposa and Monterey, and months later

they'd arrive in Adelaide; with shaking anticipatory fingers I'd open these and hear this marvellous music, never imagining for a moment that in the years to come I'd bring these very same people to Australia for concert tours. And the manager of the Commodore Music Shop I met for the first time when I went to New York in 1950. His name was Jack Crystal, he used to put on jazz concerts on Sunday afternoons, and his son was the actor, Billy Crystal –

Oh, yes?

– who is the absolute image of his father.

Really!

Yes.

He's a character!

And I did write to him once but I never got a reply, but he really was the image of his father. And, as I say, I never dreamt that – – –. Jazz is not a commercial proposition; the average entrepreneur won't see jazz as a risk worth taking, so that I was inclined – a successful jazz tour, to me, was one that covered its expenses; only occasionally did it make money and then it was people who had a wider-than-jazz appeal. I mean –

Oh, Brubeck?

– when I brought Duke Ellington out the first time, masses came because they wanted to see the legend. When I brought him back years later less than half the people came the second time. Brubeck was one because – Charlie Byrd, Herbie Mann, those people who had an appeal to more than just the jazz fans – they were often reasonably successful. But I brought someone out like Roland Kirk, wonderful musician, blind and very talented, and you know we got two hundred and twenty-something people came to the concert at the Adelaide Town Hall, it was a disaster. And it was a great thrill after his death, I was at a party in New York one night, and this black lady came over to me and said, 'I wanted to say thank you,' she said, 'you brought my husband, Roland, to Australia and he told me how much he enjoyed the tour,' and that was a real thrill. (sound of electronic device) And the thing was that I had one exceptionally financially-rewarding tour when I, for once, listened to my children and brought out Chuck Berry to Australia for the first time, and that was a *huge*

commercial success but it was an absolute nightmare, because I found over the years that most jazz musicians are nice people along with it, but if my experience with Chuck Berry was any example the same couldn't be said for the majority of pop entertainers. Because of my interest in jazz promoting I had a good friend in Melbourne called Rosa Nicholls, whose husband was involved in Neon Lights and things, and through her I was invited to become a member of a syndicate called Aztec Services, whose main claim to fame, I suppose, in retrospect, was that they brought the Beatles out.

They brought the Beatles, yes. Who negotiated that? Did Brodziac – – –?

Kenn Brodziac, and I always say that, it's like I said, I was a director of the original Austereo here, and I always used to make no bones about the fact that my main contribution, as a director of Austereo, was to – it goes back to Chuck Berry, too – when I brought Chuck Berry out I went to 5KA, who were at that time the leading station for that sort of music, and their publicity director was Paul Thompson, and I was able to – well, I don't know if 'persuade' is the right word, but say that, of all the applicants for the job of our initial CEO, 'We've got to have Paul Thompson, he'd be terrific.' And posterity has shown not only did he take Austereo to the top, but he's now doing the same thing with the Nova Network. And, as I say, I thought if I did nothing else for Austereo I was able to convince them that Paul Thompson was the one we had to have to do that job, and all these years later he's continuing to be a success in that field.

So I got into the entrepreneurial field in speedway. In jazz concerts, I put on my first jazz concert as a promoter in 1954, when I took on through Bill McColl, a Sydney radio DJ⁶, the Red Norvo Trio at Thebarton Town Hall.

The Red Norvo?

Yes. And he had a singer called Helen Humes with him, who used to sing with Count Basie, and a guitarist called Bill Dillard, who died in a fire, and a bass player called Eugene Wright, whom I still hear from every year, a black musician from California, still hear from him every year. But then I'd really got going when the

⁶ DJ – disk jockey.

Festival⁷ started, when I brought Brubeck out for the first Festival and the second Festival with Eugene Wright, and then I brought Eddie Condon, which were a lot of the Commodore Music Shop people, Pee Wee Russell and Vic Dickinson and so on, Bud Freeman, Buck Clayton. Then the Modern Jazz Quartet, then Duke Ellington, Count Basie, I brought out, and I was so thrilled to bring out Duke Ellington because one of the stars of *his* band was the saxophonist Johnny Hodges, who only died a few months after the Australian tour, so had I not brought him out Australia never would have heard the superb music of (mobile telephone interference) Johnny Hodges. So there's been, you know, a lot of money lost but a lot of personal gratification that I was able to let other Australians share my enthusiasm for the sort of music that was, generally speaking, not the sort of music that commercial promoters are interested in.

Kym, over all those years, would you have broken even, pretty much, do you think, or would it still have been a loss, or ---?

I think I probably lost more than I made.

That's what I wondered.

But, as I say, a successful tour was one that broke even, and that happened all too rarely!

Well, as far as Rowley Park goes, was that a success, financially?

Yes, but again tempered by the fact that the things that made the most money were not the really exciting events, like the England-Australia solo test matches; they were the demolition derbys, the fireworks. I was the first one to bring Howards Fireworks to Adelaide, and of course now they come for every Royal Show and any time there's a public fireworks display you can bet your bottom dollar Howards will be doing it. It was the novelty events that made the big money, but there's no doubt about that we were able to see some of the top speedway competitors in both cars and bikes. And I'd combine my overseas trips looking for speedway competitors next summer with my opportunity to pick out entertainers to bring out for concert performances. So I suppose – well, people often said, you know, 'How were you affected by your losses in the Ash Wednesday fire?' And I said, 'Well, frankly I was so busy in so many different directions I didn't have time to sit around and mope about it.' So whether it

⁷ Biennial Adelaide Festival of Arts.

was a coincidence that I had my first heart attack nine months later I don't know. Might be all the Clinkers and Fruchocs! But it did happen.

Kym, the speedway era comes to a close when you decide to go to Sydney, doesn't it, more or less?

Yes, that was – well, no, the Soccer Association announced that they were not –

Of course.

– going to renew the lease, I think it had intentions of selling it. And I always used to say, 'Well, when I die I'm going to get my ashes scattered over Rowley Park, so that all the people who used to boo me – not entirely with animosity, I like to think – would have to pick me out of their teeth.' But now they've ruined that by having a housing estate built over the top.

Did you find those Rowley Park years rewarding as well?

Yes, I get a lot of pleasure out of doing something and feeling that it's given pleasure to – it's been successful, given pleasure to others, and that is reward enough for me, really, to feel that I made something happen that has been appreciated by the general public, even though they would ostensibly call me a 'bloody pie-eater', they did it not entirely critically. In fact, I think the classic case was I went to Rowley Park after the lease had been taken over by, firstly, the Racing Drivers' Association, and as I moved amongst the crowd several people would say, 'For Christ's sake, Kym, buy the bloody place back.' (laughter)

So, Kym, what led you to take up commercial art gallery work?

Well, the commercial art – basically, as I say, my mother introduced me to an emerging form of art, artists who impressed me, like Nolan and Boyd and Dickerson, couldn't get other galleries in Adelaide to show their work. Several of them said, 'Why don't you open a gallery in Adelaide? We'd support you.' And I just happened to be lucky – another one of my fortuitous coincidences of time – I happened to do something at a moment when things were about to happen to those artists, they would soon be recognised nationally and internationally, and I just happened to be there at the right time to ride on the crest of that wave. And so that I got into it because I was encouraged to by the people that wanted to be promoted themselves.

Kym, it fascinates me that, over a lot of your lifetime, you've dealt with people in the arts and music and you said most of the jazz musicians were just great people to be with – Chuck Berry aside.

Yes.

What about the artists? What were they like to be with?

Oh, mostly pretty nice people, yes. You know, Sidney Nolan you knew that he did everything when he was thinking, 'Now, what's in it for me.' You could see that he was – I mean, you know, I think I've probably got the facts wrong, but he was offered an Order of Merit in England but he refused it because he wanted a knighthood, which is a lower order than an Order of Merit. He eventually got the knighthood but he wouldn't accept the Order of Merit because he wanted to be known as 'Sir Sidney Nolan'. So there were some people who have ulterior motives, and others that you know are genuinely appreciative of anything you can do to ---. I was on the *This is your life* program – I can't think when it was; probably in the '60s – no, 1978. Anyway, and the nicest thing for me was John Coburn and Lloyd Rees were two artists that they had invited on, and John Coburn gave me the endorsement: 'Kym Bonython, he's the straightest man in the art world of Australia.' I mean, that was an endorsement, but I couldn't have asked for something more gratifying than to hear someone like that acknowledge the fact that you were a straight shooter.

It seems to me, unlike other art dealers, you didn't have anything to prove, in one sense, other than you wanted to do it well.

Well, that has basically been the whole concept of all of it. I want to do everything as well as I can, and it's satisfying to me when I realise that I've achieved what I set out to do. I mean, there've been a number of dismal failures where [there were] people who I thought should have done better than they did with public response, but by and large I like to think that some of the things I've done have been worth doing and that I've succeeded in what I started.

Did you regret having to give up the Sydney and Adelaide galleries in time? I know you went back to work for others afterwards for a short time.

Yes. Well, I really never felt – I missed Adelaide a lot, and I felt a bit out of my depth in the crassly commercial world of Sydney art, you know, the Rudi Komons

and the Barry Sterns and, you know, I was out of my depth with those hard-headed businessmen and I missed the familiarity and the Adelaide Hills and the ease of access that Adelaide offered and I was grateful to get back. But then I realised, when I did get back, that I was too young to retire and do nothing, so when Trudy Anne, who'd been my secretary for nineteen years, asked me to run her Sydney gallery I went back over there for – it was going to be two years but I started to get this heart trouble, so I came back. I was building this house at the time, which was a fortunate – because we were living in Sydney at our other house, we built it probably a lot less expensively than if my wife had been here deciding, 'Let's change that and do this!' (laughs)

Well, look, that was an oversight of mine. You'd remarried to Julie by this time.

Yes. I married - Julie was Miss South Australia in 1956, at the time of the Olympic Games in Melbourne, and we got married at the end of '57 and I was living down at Tennyson at the time. Max Harris told me about this house that had been built by a German designer called Gunther Niggermann, and I actually looked at it for the first time the very day that he left Adelaide to go back to Germany, and I built a wing onto the house and I remember getting a – I probably had a card the next year, and Niegemann said, 'I thoroughly disapprove of what you've done to my house!' (laughter) It was a terrific spot; the only thing was it was on virgin sandhills and there was a fair bit of wear and tear from the salt spray on the paint and so on. And the final straw came when the council, in its wisdom, put a row of toilets between our house and the sea, (laughs) so that's when we left. But in those days we had an airline pilot called Eric Krieg living next door, and his daughter – what was her name? – Dale Krieg was a swimmer, and Dawn Fraser, they were all pupils of Harry Gallagher, so I used to see those people a lot when we were there. And we had some characters called Winklers living next to us, had this mad magpie, and if you went in through their front gate it would swoop on you and peck at your legs and things like that. He used to sit on the back of the couch, loved Perry Como, and the magpie would sit there rocking! But it could be quite vicious if you strode onto the place unsuspecting.

Did you move from Tennyson to Eurilla?

No, we built a house at Leabrook on a creek. John Chappel designed the place, it won all sorts of timber awards and things, and I often wonder – we had an asbestos roof and I never drink anything but rainwater, and I wonder whether I'm eventually going to get lung cancer or ---.

I think you're doing pretty well, Kym! (laughs)

I think the time is past where if I was going to get it I would have got it by now. And it was while I was living at that place that we decided to go and live in Sydney, so I sold it.

Oh, okay. So you'd had the connection with Eurilla and, I suppose, Carmino as well.

Well –

From childhood?

– well, Carmino my grandfather bought and he persuaded my father to buy adjoining Eurilla three years before I was born, but when my mother – my father died; my mother had to decide which house she would keep, the one in the city or the one at Mount Lofty, and she chose the Mount Lofty one; and when she had a stroke it looked like the house was going to be sold and that's when I bought it, thinking, 'Well, some day I'll come back from Sydney and I'll live there,' and so that's why I bought Eurilla. And although, as I say, I had heart troubles, I used to think, 'The older I get the harder it's going to be to keep this six and a half acres weed-free,' in retrospect now I always say that I miss it so much that I wish I'd been found dead under a ride-on mower instead of suffocating in North Adelaide.

So you really do miss the Hills, do you?

I do, yes. But now, you see, I'm getting to the stage where I'm having increasing problems with my legs, and the nineteen stairs from the garage to this level, or even the five from the front to here, are going to be a problem I'm eventually going to have to face. And I was going to put a lift in the back lane, coming up onto the side veranda, but just at that point I reluctantly decided the time had come when my big, heavy motorbike was too much for me, and I was all right once I was moving but if I stopped, like on the corner of Grenfell Street and East Terrace where there's a bit of camber, for the lights and the bike started to tilt, I wasn't strong enough to hold it up.

It used to get embarrassing having to ask passers-by to lift it off me. So I decided – it was a friend, I don't go to the internet, I can't cope with that – but a friend said he'd put it on the internet for me and so they advertised 'reluctant sale by eighty-three year-old owner', and unbelievably it was bought by the headmistress of a girls' school in Kent.

Oh, dear!

She and her husband have got ten other exotic bikes, and not only did she buy it but she flew it to England.

Oh!

But life has not been the same without the bike, I still miss it greatly.

Kym, in the years after the art galleries and all that, you were heavily connected with the 1986 celebrations, the 150th of South Australia –

Yes.

– and many other civic matters. What's been a stand-out for you in the last twenty years, do you think?

Well, one of the things that attracted me to the Jubilee celebration was my mother was quite involved with the 1936 Centenary celebrations, she –

She did the flower carpet.

– did the flower pageant, yes, so that sort of – so that was a great satisfaction, it seemed to involve the community pretty much. I mean, even every day I walk down North Terrace and through Alan Higginbotham Homes, who sponsored those plaques, that's been a worthwhile reminder of the Jubilee year, I think. And, you know, we were involved with the Maritime Museum and the Mortlock Library and a few other worthwhile events, so that was a great, although somewhat, sometimes, a bit exhausting, the number of speeches and things that were required, it got to be a bit of a stress, but when it was all over I felt that it was something that was worth doing and had some lingering benefits for the state. But I find, in my old age, I've – I haven't been, I used to be a movie fanatic but I haven't been for longer than any other time in my life lately; the last film I saw was the one about, *Supersize me*, about MacDonald's hamburgers. But generally I'd go two or three times a week. In fact, when I joined the Australian Council for the Arts, Nugget Coombs, who was the

President, said, ‘Well, now, in addition to being a member of the Council you are expected to take a role in some other aspect of society,’ and I forget what it was, ‘either community something or films.’ I said, ‘Films.’ So I was first Chairman of the Experimental Film Fund, and we had people like Philip Adams and Barry Jones and people like that on it, and we gave grants to people who’ve gone on – Bruce Beresford was our chief executive officer. And really all we did was we endorsed the recommendations of our expert staff of people like that. I remember there was one classic grant that we made that the staff felt that the Committee ought to be aware of the sort of projects that were being recommended for support, and there was one – because the government had said that no political considerations should – they should be awarded purely on merit. And one of the – Gorton was the Prime Minister of the day. One of the projects was a film called *The phallic forest*, and there’s this bored-looking housewife out in her backyard with a hose watering the plants and there’s a pinewood fence dividing her from the neighbour. Suddenly, through a knothole in the pine fence, comes a giant cock, (laughs) you see, and the staff thought maybe Mr Gorton might frown on us giving funds to make such a film. And I can’t remember whether it was Barry Jones or Philip Adams said, ‘Object?’ He said, ‘We’re thinking of asking him to provide the props!’ (laughter) That’s right, this giant cock comes to the fence, and then you get a close-up of the housewife’s eyes lighting up and the hose spraying in all directions! And they did make the film, *The phallic forest*, but I don’t know whatever happened.

And there were light moments. Peter Coleman was on the Council at the time, and he said, in his rather sardonic manner, he said, ‘Barry, whenever your photograph appears in the paper it used to always say, “Barry Jones, quiz whiz”, you know’ he said, ‘Nowadays it says, “Barry Jones, parliamentary wit”.’ And Barry said, very expansively, ‘Well, you know,’ he said, ‘in the world of the bland, even the one-barb man is king.’ (laughter) So you were enlivened by such moments. And Barry Jones went to the premiere of the opera *The rape of Lucretia*, and he told the Council the next day that, he said, ‘Whilst the singing was adequate,’ he said, ‘the acting left a little to be desired. In fact,’ he said, ‘the rape was more like *coitus interruptus*.’ (laughter)

So you’ve had a lifetime of characters really, Kym, haven’t you?

Yes, indeed. Yes. And I was only, I was invited to the parents' for dinner last night, and as I left I said, 'Well, as Henri Bastin' – the primitive artist – 'used to say,' –we used to take him down to Rowley Park and he lived in a boarding house down on the corner of Jeffcott Street and Ward Street and we used to drop him off on the corner, and he had this regular statement as he got out of the car and the children used to roar with laughter for years after: he would say, 'Thank you for pleasant evening,' and *slam* the door with such force that the door would almost go straight out, and I said to Bev and Lance last night, 'As Henri Bastin used to say, "Thank you for pleasant evening."' (laughter)

Well, thank you, Kym, for talking to me today. It's been a great pleasure.

Okay.

Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.