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OH 812

Full transcript of an interview with

ROBERT HANNAFORD

on 14 March 2007

By Rob Linn

For the

EMINENT AUSTRALIANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Recording available on CD

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A series of dots, **.... ....** indicates an untranscribable word or phrase.

Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, **- - -.**

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 812

Interview with Robert Hannaford conducted by Rob Linn on the 14th March 2007 for the Eminent Australians Oral History Project of the National Library and the State Library of South Australia.

DISK 1

This is an interview with Robert Hannaford, 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 I'd like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this program. 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?

I do. (laughter)

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 14th March 2007 at Gilberton, South Australia.

Well, Alf, as I asked you a few minutes ago, can you please tell me about your parents?

Yes. Well, first of all, I'd like to apologise for my croaky voice. I've had an operation last year and it's resulted in a rather croaky voice.

I was born in Riverton, and my father was a fourth generation, born in Riverton. Our forefathers, (laughs) or the great-great-great-grandmother, or whoever she was, that came out from Devon at the beginning of settlement, 1840s or '50s, and she settled in the Riverton district with ten children – six sons and four daughters, I think it was. Some of them went down towards Adelaide, Cudlee Creek area, and other stayed at Riverton. And I'm the fifth generation from that family on my father's side.

My mother, Vera Hoare – – –.

What was your father's Christian name?

Claude. Yes, he was one of two children, born to Sam and Alma Hannaford, in Riverton, on the same land that I was brought up on.

My mother, Vera Hoare, she came from Bute and her forebears were Scottish and Irish. (laughter)

Now, how big was the property at Riverton?

It was approximately one square mile, I think it was six hundred and twelve acres, and it's remained that size. My family seemed to be very good at farming. It's quite a small farm by Riverton standards, but my father was a very good farmer, I think. He knew what to plant and when, and he wasn't one for great innovations and things – at least, when I knew him; apparently he was a little earlier in his life. And my brother, who took on the farm, is also a good farmer, that's my brother Don.

You have another brother, Ian.

Yes. I was one of four children. My father left the farm to the one that was most interested in it, and that was my brother Don, so we all, the other three, made our way in the world (laughs) without the farm, which pleased us, actually. It worked out very well, because if the farm had had to be split it would have been difficult.

So, Alf, tell me, are you all boys?

Three boys, and I'm the third; and then one girl, my sister Kay is two years younger than me.

So there's Ian ,Don, then you.

Yes.

Then Kay?

Then Kay, yes.

Now, my knowledge of the Riverton area is that it's a very beautiful part of South Australia. What did you think of as a child when you were walking around the area, or the farm?

Well, it is a beautiful part of the country, I think. It's situated in one of the valleys with a river – well, we call it the 'River Gilbert'; it's more like a –

Creek.

– a creek. (laughter) But it is a beautiful valley and as the Mount Lofty Ranges merge in with the Flinders Ranges there it's sort of parallel ridges, and we were in the Gilbert Valley, which was one of those valleys, which backed up to the Belvedere Range, and our farm was nestled on the eastern side of that valley. And there was a

spring-fed creek from the hills that ran through our property, which was sort of like the life blood. It was a wonderful area for me as a child.

My experiences on the land, I suppose, had a lot to do with walking over the farm, the creeks, and being the third son I didn't have to do quite as much work as my two older brothers so I had more freedom to explore the region.

Were you always interested in the natural flora and fauna?

I was. I mentioned the creek; I used to spend an enormous amount of time with frogs and tadpoles and creek life. You know, I used to look for the bottleneck swallows that nested in the banks, and I'd follow the creek back into the hills, and I was a nature boy, really. I used to spend a lot of time on my own, because my two older brothers were a bit too old for me to play with, and my younger sister was a girl and not so interested in outdoor things. So I would wander off. And I had a pet kangaroo as a child, which was very important to me, and a pet galah, and they would follow me around.

Did you raise the kangaroo yourself?

Yes, we did. We got it from – a dingo dog fence inspector who used to live in Riverton, and he would come back once every six months or a year, and one day he brought back a baby kangaroo for me, and my mother and I nursed it through those early months. In those days there were no formulas for kangaroos or how to feed them, so she being an ex-nurse, (parrot calls) we experimented with cod liver oil and all sorts of things to stop the scouring, and it was such a tiny little fellow, he used to sleep in a sugar bag, and he survived all that and was a wonderful pet. And he died on the ninth day of the ninth month, 1954. So I was not yet ten, but it was a big day in my life, hence I can even remember the date when that kangaroo died. I was devastated, and I literally couldn't attend school for a few days. It was a very traumatic event which perhaps showed my relationship to nature. I couldn't have imagined suffering any more if one of my parents had died. (laughs)

And was that just of natural causes the kangaroo died?

Well, I think he possibly ate something. I remember one day – incidentally, this kangaroo was never locked up, he just jumped around the house and lived in the sugar bag, and he wasn't fully-grown when he died – one day we came home and I remember he'd been eating a packet of tacks, you know, steel tacks, and I got them all out of his mouth, but they did that kind of thing and I imagine that something like that eventually killed him.

So from a very early age, Alf, you had this fascination with – I guess 'the land', we'd call it, overall, the landscape and its creatures.

Yes.

Did either of your parents also have a great love of the land in that way?

No, to be quite honest. My mother was a hard-working woman. In those days, before the power came to the district, there was a lot of hard work for them both to do. My mother used to have to – she would be out chopping wood and all the activities involved with cooking and looking after the farm while my father was outside all the time. It was a hard life, and there wasn't much time for recreation, as far as they were concerned and, as I said, being the third son I did have that element of freedom which my other brothers didn't have and I would be off on my own. I don't recall – only once or twice we went camping in the hills, we'd go up to the scrub. Very memorable times for me because I've spent a huge amount of time there since I grew up. But we weren't one of those families that spent a long time in the bush – although we used to go to the River Murray occasionally, fishing.

Which part?

Around Blanchetown, between Blanchetown and Morgan.

So pretty direct from where you lived.

Yes, straight across the hills and then across the plains to the river, it's only about fifty miles.

And did the river also speak to you like the natural land did around your area?

Oh, it did. We loved the river. We used to swim in it and I used to love those fishing trips, although I didn't do much fishing; the kids would just run around and swim and really enjoyed those times. And I remember the big flood of '56, we went over and helped sandbag. Yes, the River Murray was one of our visiting spots, and so was Port Parham on the Gulf, we'd go across there, or sometimes we'd visit Adelaide beaches.

So it seems to me from what you've been saying your family was pretty close, really, despite the hard times. Would that be fair?

Yes, I think so. We always got on very well together and enjoyed each other's company, and I used to love going back to Riverton, as I still do. My mother is still alive and I never had that generation gap with my parents, I always loved them and

was proud of them and I would love to take my friends back there to meet them, and they all seemed to like them, too.

Do you still have a place at Riverton now?

Yes, I bought some land there – I've always loved the country there, so I returned there in – well, we'll probably come to this in the interview, the chronology; but I did buy a place back there about twenty years ago, not far from where I was brought up, an old farmhouse with ten acres, and I've lived there ever since.

So the house in Adelaide is really a by-play to real life at Riverton, is it?

Well, I do feel a little bit that way. Riverton is home, it's where I was born and bred and I still feel a very strong affinity with it, perhaps like one does to a parent. I've noticed that over the course of my life the big issues, the big things in my life, start, begin, in Riverton – I mean my conservation interests have spread from Riverton; my painting interests; my understanding of the natural world. For instance, when I took an intellectual interest in the natural world, when I went back there when I was about twenty-five, I first immersed myself in the wildlife of the Riverton district before I could understand their place in the world scheme.

Alf, just coming back to your childhood and youth, then, was your early education at Riverton?

Yes, I went to the Riverton Kindergarten, Primary School and High School, and my parents sent us to boarding college for our final year, so I came down to Prince Alfred College to do my matriculation in 1960.

What did your mother and father think about education? Was it important to them that all of you knew and understood the world educationally, scholastically?

Well, I think it was, actually, at least to my father. He was one of the few kids sent to Prince Alfred College himself from that neck of the woods, and he thought it was quite important. I'm not sure I share that view myself – well, I didn't send *my* children to Prince Alfred College, for instance – but I will say that it was a wonderful experience; but educationally I don't think it's any better than anywhere else. (laughs) I mean, they did do matriculation at the Riverton High School, but my father and mother I think thought it was an important thing perhaps to broaden our horizons, to give us that year away.

You would have had Jack Dunning as Headmaster at PAC at that time.

I did, yes.

Intrepid man himself.

He was a wonderful man, very well-respected by everybody. I've never heard a bad word against Jack Dunning by the students or anybody else. He was a wonderful, inspiring – not inspiring, but just a wonderful man.

And I'm just thinking, Reverend Kyle[?] Waters would have been Chaplain at that time.

He was.

And so Tubby McFarlane[?] would have been there then as a teacher, Bruce McFarlane Senior?

Yes, I remember him.

It was quite a parade of people.

Oh, there were. Most of these people taught my father, or Dunning didn't, but there was Luke –

Tag[?] Luke.

– Tag Luke, and a couple of others, I've just forgotten their names now.

Mutton?

Yes, Juicy Mutton, (laughs) as they used to call him.

So were your parents themselves readers, Alf?

Not really. My father was well-educated, he was brought up in the times when a classical education was important, and for instance he knew the Bible well and he spoke very good English, I think, by the standards of my generation. And my mother had to leave school early to help bring up her younger siblings, but she's a very – how can I put it? – intelligent woman. We respected – or still do, respect her for her insights and intelligence.

Alf, she trained as a nurse, you said?

She trained as a nurse.

Where, in Adelaide or in the country?

In the country. And Riverton was her first nursing appointment, and that was the way it happened in those days. You'd come to a country town –

Met your father.

– meet one of the local farmers (laughs) and – – –.

Just a comment you made earlier about your father's knowledge of the Bible: were your parents religious people in that sense, Christians?

No, I don't think. (parrot whistles) I don't think they gave – I don't think either of them really deeply believed in God. I think they followed the habits of their generation. We went to church occasionally. They used to send us off to Sunday School, we always felt so that they could have an afternoon drinking with their friends, (laughs) so they'd stick us into Sunday School. Religion didn't play an important part in our lives at all – although, having said that, I used to say my prayers diligently as a child to myself. I asked my brothers and sisters about that the other day and they said they didn't, so where that came from I don't know. But I abandoned all that later on in my teens, and I looked carefully into it, thought to ask myself 'What is this all about?' It seemed to me an important question to come to terms with. And I started reading and within a few months I read people like, (laughs) in those days, Malcolm Muggeridge had become a Christian and he wrote books about it; and what's his name, that evangelist from America, I read him.

Billy Graham?

Billy Graham. And I was appalled at both of those books. I thought they asked questions and talked about things that were completely irrelevant. And then I read Bertrand Russell, *Why I'm not a Christian*, and that appealed to me at that age and I felt a – people talk about the wonderful thing with attaining faith; I felt a release from that whole religion thing as a wonderful thing, a freedom, and I was so glad to be able to put it all behind me and I've never regretted it.

So, Alf, were you at school when this happened or had you left school?

I think I'd left school when I started to earnestly look at the world and started to – I realised I hadn't had a very good education when I left school. (laughs) There were huge gaps in my understanding of the world, I realised, and I set about trying to fill those gaps after I left school.

Well, if we can come back to that in a minute, I'd like to pursue that. But importantly, in one sense, while your Christian name is 'Robert' you're known as 'Alf'. How did that name, or tag, come about?

(laughs) Well, that came about through an uncle of mine called Jack, my mother's younger brother – wonderful man, he and I used to really love each other. He would come up to Riverton to stay and he loved the country and he'd go shooting and he had aeroplanes, model aeroplanes. He was a fanatic with mechanical things like that and he would ply them across the hills and we would go out with him. And he

started calling me 'Alfie 'obbes' from a radio program in the 1940s called *Mrs 'obbes*, and I can just remember it, but it was a bit of a *Dad and Dave* type program, and I remember she had a young son called Alfie. And he started calling me 'Alfie 'obbes, the crow', for some reason. But that was when I was four, and by the time I'd gone to school everybody called me Alfie including the teachers and my parents, and it has been that way ever since.

Be a problem on the passport, wouldn't it?

(laughter) Yes, I'm 'Robert' on my passport, and occasionally these days I get my name in the paper and it's usually put down as 'Robert', and I've got a whole range of friends in recent years that call me Robert.

Well, Alf, I'd like to come back to this experience that you talked about after school, where you realised these holes in your education. How did you go about trying to fill the voids?

Well, I should explain how it happened. I was never a reader at school, although I did read one or two books. I used to do colouring-in competitions, I started them when I was about seven – and I'm sorry to be not quite answering your question at this stage.

That's fine, no.

I'll go back to where I got these books. And I would win these prizes and you'd get points, and this was for the *Sunday Advertiser*, and if you got twenty-five points you'd get a book sent to you. And I had a few books sent to me, some of which were unreadable and I threw aside, but one was called *Boomer*, about a kangaroo, and I read it avidly, I loved it. And I read very few books; I didn't read the traditional children's books. I was a real outdoors boy, not a studier, and consequently I didn't have – my education wasn't what it could have been, and I realised this as I passed through and I did matriculate eventually from Prince Alfred College; but I started to read avidly after leaving school and I became and I always have been since then a great reader. I was very bad at spelling at school, probably because I didn't read much. But I don't regret it, because those childhood years of not reading I'm very pleased with, glad of now, because they gave me a basis of contact with nature and perhaps resolving things in my own way from my solitude that I appreciate now.

When you say 'solitude', were you withdrawn from other young people?

Oh, no. No, but living on a farm – I loved school for the reason of mixing with my friends. No, I wasn't withdrawn. I think my mother would describe me as – you

know, I was fun-loving, I was a bit of a show-off, I used to entertain my parents with jokes and their friends, and I loved their friends as well. No, I was a gregarious child.

Did sport play a part in that as well?

Sport played an enormous part in my life and probably the life of the whole family. My oldest brother was an interstate footballer.

I was just going to say 'Why did I even ask the question?'

(laughter) Yes.

I suddenly realised.

That's right: well-known football family, and sport was central to our lives. And I loved it, I was a very physical child, I could walk on my hands and stand on my head, you know, for showing off; and I used to win all the races at school and that kind of thing. And I went on through my education in Adelaide, football and athletics were central to my latter schooling years, as they were to my brothers.

That would have appealed to the then philosophy at PAC, which was strongly emphasising sport.

Possibly. Yes, I guess it did. I don't know if it did. Oh, Jack Dunning, our headmaster, he was a cricketer I believe –

And rugby player.

– and rugby, yes – so yes, it was given high priority. (laughs)

So sport and physical activity was just part of it all for you.

It was. The sporting business culminated, I suppose, the year after I left school. I went out, without training, and won the State long jump, which surprised me. I didn't train, I think I got drunk the night before, and I went out and beat our Olympian, Graham Boase.

Oh, yes?

With my last jump of the day I jumped 23 feet 10 inches, which is not a bad leap when you look at it. (laughter) And that was the last jump I did. I gave up athletics after that. Well, I got too busy. I didn't take much interest in pursuing my sporting career. But I played football for one more year after I left school, one or two, I played for Port Adelaide, which was the Hannaford tradition, and I think I was expected to go on and play league with the others. But I'd like to think I gave it up – well, I was

asked to give it up when I started work at *The Advertiser* because I had to work on Sundays.

Did Bob McLean at Port Adelaide Club get you into that?

Yes.

How did I know that, Alf? (laughter) A great arm-twister.

Yes. No, Bob McLean and Fos Williams came up to recruit my brother Ian, and we always remained good friends after that, and I think both of those two expected me to carry on the tradition, but I decided at nineteen to give up football to concentrate on my painting.

Now, I hesitate to do this, but can we go back a bit, Alf? Where did this interest in painting begin?

Well, it began as far back as I can remember. I could draw well, and paint, I used to love drawing and painting as a child and I can remember in our kitchen out on the farm I would put up my little watercolours and drawings I had done all around the cupboards and things; and at school I was always the artist in the group – even the teachers would ask me to draw maps and things on the blackboard; and it was always my job to do the illustrations for the school play, you know, the props. So it was the thing I was noted for as a child more than anything, I suppose.

Did your teachers encourage you?

I remember one teacher saying, 'You'll be an artist', when I was in about grade five. But the culture of the time wasn't conducive to such thoughts. I never took it seriously, because being in the country in the 1940s and '50s, my knowledge of art was nil and I guess the idea of an artist in those days was a Frenchman with a beret on his head doing abstract.

Doesn't that seem strange – – –?

À la Kandinsky, in retrospect.

But doesn't it seem strange, in hindsight, that during the Second World War artists like Ivor Hele and Murray Griffin and others were such an important part of recording what happened and the characters involved, and yet it seemed to be left behind? So that's a reflection on my behalf; I've often wondered about it.

I'm sorry – – –?

Well, in Australian society, when you were growing up in rural South Australia, very few people gave art a second thought, and yet there'd been this fabulous tradition.

Yes. I'm sure that I'd love to have known Heysen as a child, because one's interest probably would have expanded more quickly; but there certainly wasn't any serious knowledge of art. I mean, I didn't know the well-known artists in the world or anything like that until I left school.

Did your parents have any – – –?

Not really. No, there were no paintings or reproductions in the house. I used to love looking through books and I'd always be attracted to illustrations and things, and I do remember one day – in those days travelling salesmen used to visit the farms, and one day a man came in and he brought out some pencil drawings that he'd done of the bush, and I was only a small child but I remember thinking how wonderful. And so, as a small child, I would attempt these intricate drawings and I drew much better than the other kids at the school. I can remember in grade one and two when I was five or six showing the other children that the sky actually came down to the horizon and how to draw hills behind each other and trees in front, and I remember pointing out that there are such things as stomach muscles. So I would spend a lot of time, even at that age, trying to get the thumb on the (laughs) right side of the hand, and perhaps even at that early stage using myself as a model, to understand what people looked like.

Now, your parents obviously didn't discourage you.

No; my mother was an artist in her own right. She's a great craftswoman, and even as a child and even though she was busy, she used to do a lot of craftwork. And I remember we made some floats for the Christmas parade, and my mother – she actually took up woodwork and leatherwork and crafts like that in her spare time when I was a child. So she always looked at my work with an artistic eye and definitely encouraged me, and she loved my interest in painting and in one sense – and I think she's mentioned this – that it was what she would love to have done, given different circumstances.

So then, rounding that off, Alf, and coming back to your leaving school, was it then when you left school that you went to *The Advertiser* to work, or was there something else in between?

Yes, there was something in between. I wanted to get a job in the art world somewhere, I wanted to be an artist, I wanted to teach myself how to draw and paint. And this was the time when I mentioned earlier I started reading, and I really – it was a wonderful time in my life, I really felt the world was at my feet. And in those days one had that feeling that you could do anything you wanted to. Jobs were

plentiful: if you wanted to work, you only had to go down to the office and pick a job that you liked from the wall and you could go and earn money for a few weeks. I think it was almost full employment in those days.

This would be '61–62?

This was '61 when I left school – yes, at the end of '61. So I wanted to work in an advertising agency, which seemed the most logical step for an aspiring artist in those days. It was an outlet that isn't available today, unfortunately; but in those days the art departments were training grounds for aspiring artists like myself.

So would this be with – I'm not saying that you worked with him, but with people like Wit[?] Morrow?

I don't recall Wit Morrow. But I did meet Hugo Shaw, who was my elder brother Ian's girlfriend's brother, and we went to visit him one day when I was still at school and I remember going into his room, which was his studio – he was a few years older than me – and he was drawing beautiful drawings, I thought, and this was the first contact I had with an artist with similar interests to my own. And so I kept in touch with Hugo and he told me – he worked at Clem Taylor advertising agency, and I think it was he that suggested I try to get a job there. So I went along and I showed them my drawings, and this was just after I left school.

Just before that, to fill in time and to earn money, I became a builder's labourer, and I remember working on a jackhammer in one of the streets of Adelaide and one of my teachers went past, and I thought I saw him shake his head as if he thought, 'Ah, that's what I thought you'd end up doing!' (laughter) Anyway – – –.

Who was the builder you worked for?

Fricker Brothers.

Oh yes, okay.

Yes, it was a very interesting time and I don't regret it. But I was waiting for something to come up, and eventually I took my work in to this agency where Hugo worked, wanting to be in proximity to Hugo, and they said they couldn't take me on as they had plenty. And I said I'd work for nothing, and that took them aback a bit. And the art director there was a chap called Fraser Hay, who really liked my drawings.

H-A-Y?

H-A-Y. He went on later to become an artist and he died a year or two ago. And he really did like my work, so he plugged for it and I got the job, I got a job. And it was

six pounds a week, which was half what they should have paid me, but as I said I'd work for nothing they said, 'Well, you can come in in the Art Department.' And after a month or so I think it went up to – oh, I can't remember now, but it was peanuts. (laughs) As a builder's labourer I was earning eighteen pounds a week, I'd fudged my age to twenty-one even though I was seventeen so that I could get that extra couple of quid, in those days, a week. Anyway, that experience in the advertising agency – I worked there for a year before I left of my own free will – was fantastic, because Hugo, I would draw all night, in the evenings, and take my work to him next day and he would look through it and we'd go through books and I was reading then so it was a wonderful time, and it opened my mind to the art world – the big art world, I mean, not the modern art world. We looked through books, technical books on drawing, we studied light and form and perspective and anatomy, and each day we talked about these things, often for hours, along with Des Hurcombe another artist there.

How do you spell his surname?

H-U-R-C-O-M-B-E. And Des was a wonderful artist as well.

Did you ever have any thought of going to the School of Art?

Yes, I looked into it at that time and I went down there and enrolled in evening classes, because I had to work during the day, and I did attend those evening classes for some months. I did Life Drawing.

Who took that, do you recall? Was it Des Bettany?

No, it was a Mrs Cant, I think.

Yes, that's right.

It was good, but life drawing, it was my first experience of life drawing. I remember my first model that came out, she would have been about a girl about my age, and she had her knickers on and bare-breasted and everything, and I hadn't seen this kind of thing particularly. (laughs) Maybe in the dark in my fumblings, but not in real life, so to speak, and it was quite an experience drawing this beautiful young girl, which happened there, and it took me a few minutes to psychologically (laughs) adjust to the situation. But I eventually was able to – – –.

Obviously brought up at Riverton, Alf.

Yes! But I soon got into it and I loved drawing and I've drawn continuously from the model ever since. And I also joined a sculpture group, and I've forgotten the name of the guy, but it was useless, really. We started off with such basic stuff – – –.

Was it at the School of Art?

At the School of Art.

Max Lyle, was it?

No, it wasn't Max Lyle. It was another well-known sculptor, little grey-headed guy. Can't remember his name now. But I decided I was on my own course with Hugo and Des, and the books I was then reading and the work I was doing. I'd already come to the conclusion that one had to work hard and study from nature. So I decided to stop going to art school because it was a waste of time and money; I was much better off spending that time with my own studies.

So this was obviously a very formative period in your life of discovery and enthusiasm and love of life – it sounds like that, anyway.

Yes, it was.

You left at the end of '62, early '63?

I left the advertising agency round about '63, and then I set out to be – (laughs) when I look back, the arrogance of it is amazing – but I thought I'd be able to make my way as an artist – you know, I was eighteen – commercial artist, on my own, rather than in the advertising agency, because to be quite frank I wasn't getting the really good work that I wanted to do in the advertising agency. They had other artists and I was looking after the filing system, and I used to do the Serv-Wel ads: little, tight drawings of Milo boxes and things like that – some of which, incidentally, they used for decades afterwards. But it was good experience. And the lettering I did with Des Hurcombe was a wonderful experience and stood me, I think, in good stead as far as understanding composition ever since.

So this was in the tradition of composition – I was just about to say that – that the lettering that had come round through three or four centuries of pursuit of composition of type and hand composition.

Yes.

That must have been extraordinary –

Yes, it was.

– because you were really at the end of that period.

Right at the end. I remember Letraset had just come in and it was starting to take over. But we were still taught and we did a lot of hand lettering, and I'm so glad of that experience because, as I said, it was sort of like mathematics is to the thinking brain, lettering is to the artistic.

Did you do the open engraved letters and everything like that, Alf?

We did the serif Roman lettering – that's how Des taught me; it wasn't necessary for my work, but you understand that all the main work I did was extracurricular, nothing to do with the agency. But we were like a little trio of artists, fascinated with the art world, the artists. So I would spend days sometimes perfecting a couple of Roman letters and getting the spacing right between them and taking them back to Des, and we'd analyse it and we'd look at it and he'd think it could be a little bit wider here or just go through the line there, and I understood that with Roman lettering every letter is different and you vary it according to what it's next to so that it looks right, which is one of the great principles of – going back to the Roman, Greek times when they merged their pillars and things so that they looked right from the ground, rather than mechanically did them.

Where were you living at this time?

Well, I was living at Lincoln College, a University boarding college. When I was a builder's labourer, one of the jobs was on Lincoln College. They bought another house in Brougham Place. So I moved in and stayed there during the holidays – this was before I started work at the agency – and my older brother had gone there, Ian – he's left by then – but I got to know the Master there and I more or less just – – –.

Who was that? Arthur Jackson at the time?

No. He did come while I was there, but – what was his name?

Well, Frank Hambly – – –.

Hambly, Frank Hambly. And he and I became very good friends and he allowed me to stay on, he more or less shut his eyes to the fact that I wasn't at university, and so I lived at Lincoln College. And that was a wonderful experience, too, because I was mixing with interesting people and I started doing cartoons for the local magazine and then for *On Dit*, the University magazine.

So hence you had a connection to the University.

Hence my connection to the University, and my beginning in cartooning. I'd always done cartoons as a child, and it was just a natural interest, and they wrote me in and

I'd do all the funny drawings at the boarding college, Lincoln; and it wasn't long before I was illustrating for *On dit*.

That would have stirred Frank Hambly no end.

Well, he loved it, and I'm sure that's the reason he let me stay there. He did write me a letter after I'd been there about two years and said, 'I think it wouldn't be a bad idea if you went to university; it is part of the rules.' So I joined up the University, I had matriculated, so in those days you could do whatever you wanted to do. So I thought, 'Well, I'll do something I know least about', because you understand this was me in my self-education phase. I really took these sorts of things seriously. 'It's no use doing something I know about; I'll do something I don't know.' So I did Economics, and I hated it. (laughs) I was so bad. I only did it for about three months and then I quietly dropped out and kept staying on at Lincoln.

Nonetheless, you would have had a particularly interesting crew of lecturers and tutors at that time in the Economics Faculty.

Yes. It wasn't without its rewards for me. Lincoln College was fantastic, you know. Every evening we'd sit around and talk about everything under the sun, and some of my best friends came from Asia. And I continued my interest in athletics and art and reading. I was reading everything in those days – science and history – – –. So it was just a wonderful place to live. And of course it led directly into cartooning, and then it was about that time I left the agency and I was doing cartoons for *On dit* that I eventually took my cartoons to Pat Oliphant on *The Advertiser* and showed them to him, and he and I became good friends and he suggested that I try for his job when he left.

Tell me about Pat Oliphant, Alf.

Well, he started at *The Advertiser* as a copy boy, and like me he used to muck around drawing caricatures and things, and he became noticed, I suppose, this young kid doing these wonderful drawings. And at the age of eighteen or something he was taken on as cartoonist. I think that's why he wanted me to do it, because I was eighteen when I met him. And so when I was nineteen – I used to take my cartoons to him on a weekly basis and he would suggest things, and I started taking an interest in thinking up ideas because he'd given me pre-warning that he was leaving, and he hadn't even told *The Advertiser* at this stage so I had plenty of time to prepare for that job. And when it came up and he left for the *Denver Post* in '64 I applied, along with others, including the present cartoonist, Atchison, I think he was in England. Anyway, I got the job, due to all the work I'd done preparing for it. So I worked there

for three years, from '64 to '67, before I decided to leave and concentrate on my painting.

How did you view a caricature, cartoon? What were the elements in it that were important to you?

Caricature? Well, it was right up my alley. I'd been doing this from childhood. And I read a book by David Low about this time, a biography of the great New Zealand cartoonist who went to England and ended up at the *Manchester Guardian* – still alive, incidentally, when I was reading him and doing cartoons.

Was he truly?

Yes.

I mean, he was just the doyen of cartoonists.

He was. He was. And a great draftsman. He went in as an artist, so to speak, rather than a political mind. But his book was very inspiring because he drew everything, and I took his lead and I'd go to the law courts and draw them. In those days Owen Dixon was there, I remember drawing him; and I went to Parliament and drew Tom Playford and all those sort of people while they were in session, à la David Low. So he was my inspiration as a cartoonist, more than Pat Oliphant – although I think if I look back at my early cartoons I can see his influence there, too.

Did you have a signature that you thought was important to add to the cartoons themselves?

No. I decided – – –.

Oliphant did, didn't he?

Oliphant had the little penguin.

Penguin.

And a lot of people were asking me why [I didn't]. I just thought it was too obviously copying the tradition, and I decided not to. And I signed my cartoons exactly the same way I signed pictures, the way I wrote my name. (laughs)

But were the topics for the cartoons decided for you, or did you do that?

No, I did them. Each day I would do four ideas, drawn up on rough paper, and I used to get a few overseas newspapers and *The Advertiser* and *The News* on my desk, and I'd go in about two in the afternoon, I'd draw these cartoons up pretty quickly – in the end I only read the headlines, because (laughs) that was the best way to come up with something – and I used to take them to a meeting at about three

o'clock of all the head people at *The Advertiser*: the day editor, the night editor, the general manager, the managing director – that was the sort of policy meeting to determine what happened the next day – and they would pick the cartoon most suitable for me to draw up, of my four ideas.

So, Alf, who were those people? Was one of them Reg Kempton[?], would he have been there then?

No. There was McFarlane, Don Williams, Harry Plumridge was day editor, Claude[?] Hill was night editor.

So Harry Plumridge had been around for a while at that time, hadn't he?

Yes. He was a wonderful man, I got to know him and I was closest to him of all the people there, and it was he that I wrote my letter of resignation to and he asked me to stay on and give it a bit longer. But I left *The Advertiser* for two reasons: (a) to concentrate on my painting – even though I'd got down to doing my job in only a couple of hours a day. (laughs)

I would have thought that lifestyle was – – –.

It was a wonderful lifestyle and good money, and my parents thought I was mad when I decided to leave. But it was Vietnam time and I was of the age group, call-up, and so I had plenty of friends that were involved and I started to take the political side of things more seriously and, as I looked into it, my ideas diverged a little bit from the paper, who in those days were – as they still are – pretty conservative. 'All the way with LBJ[1]' was their motto. And when I realised my best ideas were being rejected – I'd do a really good idea, I thought, for Vietnam and I'd put it in with my four cartoons and often it would be rejected and I'd have to either go back or else they'd choose one of the human interest stories – I realised there was no future in cartooning for me if that – – –. In fact, I had to toe the line, the paper line, it seemed.

So as soon as I knew that I decided to get out and concentrate a hundred per cent on my painting, which, through that time, I'd rented a little place in North Adelaide and I was living there. I'd left the University boarding college and I rented a studio in – it was an old loft, on the corner of Barton Terrace and LeFevre Terrace: one pound a week I paid for it – and I lived in it. And while I was doing the cartoon I would be spending the rest of the day drawing, very careful. I'd met Ivor Hele by now and my studies in drawing had deepened quite considerably.

[1] LBJ – Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of the United States of America.

Now, where and how did you meet Ivor Hele?

Well, I met my future wife in '64, Kate Gilfillan, whose stepfather was Sir Kenneth Wills, Brigadier during the Second World War, who had quite a bit to do with Ivor Hele, the war artist. And I of course knew of Ivor's work and in fact Hugo Shaw had known Ivor and had some lessons from him. So much of our conversation, Hugo's and mine, revolved around what Ivor did and thought, and people like Heysen. Incidentally, I met Heysen before I met Hele, which was another great moment for me.

Did you meet him at The Cedars or in Adelaide?

At The Cedars. I mentioned the studio in North Adelaide. My next door neighbour there was David Dridan, who had the studio, the loft in the next house, and he lived in Barton Terrace. So David and I were great friends, and he was seeing Heysen quite regularly. And I asked if I could go with him one day and he let me come, and I met Sir Hans, and I went up two or three times after that and I showed him my work, and he was a wonderful man – so broad-minded, humble. We talked about art, he showed me through his studio. Of course, Heysen was the one artist that I knew about as a child, and he's probably always been the greatest influence on me. I think of him often. I think his drawings and watercolours particularly are world class.

I've been fortunate to see a lot of his early drawings and I was stunned by the quality, particularly – well, not that early, actually – the ones he did of the farming labourers and the farmers.

Yes.

They're just magnificent pieces of work.

They are. I think so. And his draftsmanship of his drawings of trees and landscape, particularly the Flinders Ranges.

Was Nora in New South Wales by then?

Yes. When I met him, his wife had just died and his granddaughter, Josephine, was in residence looking after him – oh, well, he wasn't too bad then; it was a few years before he died, some years. When would this have been? In the mid-'60s and he died in about '70, I think. Yes, so that was a wonderful inspiration for me, knowing Heysen. And I read, about that time the book came out of him by Colin Thiele, and I read that avidly.

A very good book.

We were talking about meeting Ivor. So it was through Sir Kenneth Wills that I got the introduction. He came down with me, and I remember distinctly that we went down to meet Ivor and I took some of my drawings, and I can recall that Ivor – I was a little bit intimidated. I knew what Ivor was like: he was a bit of a recluse and he didn't suffer fools gladly, (laughs) and I was half-expecting to be turned away. But he actually saw something in my work which was – it gave me terrific confidence that I was on the right track to think that somebody like Ivor appreciated something in my work. And he asked me to come down any time I wanted to and – – –.

This is to Port Willunga?

Yes, Aldinga.

Aldinga, yes.

So this would have been mid-'60s, I was at *The Advertiser* so it was about '64 or '5. And it was central to me, my relationship with Ivor. I would take my work to him because he just had such good eye, such knowledge of everything I wanted to know, that I felt I was the luckiest person alive to have this contact. So I would go and see him two or three times a year in those years, and I kept in touch right until he died in '93, I think it was, I'd go and visit him every year, and always take work down to him, and his comments were always very helpful. He wasn't a man of great many words, but I used to find that when I showed him one of my drawings in the studio – you know, the procedure was I'd go down and he'd say, 'Come in and let's have a look at what you've been doing' and 'You've been busy', and he'd stand there and draw heavily on a cigarette, and I'd have my work up on his easel and it would be quiet and he wouldn't say a word. And I'd die a thousand deaths as I observed my work there in front of this man who had such a good eye, and I would see all my mistakes, all my weaknesses, all my pretensions in my own work, and he wouldn't have to say a word. But if he did say something he was usually encouraging. And then he'd point to my weaknesses or misunderstandings, to do often with edges and warm and cold – or that's when I got into painting; the first few years it was just drawing, tone and form.

So drawing with pencil or charcoal?

Yes, pencil and charcoal.

So did you go straight from that into oils, or did you try watercolour?

I never stopped with watercolour, but I did stop oil painting. I didn't paint in oils until after I left *The Advertiser* and decided to take up oil painting seriously. I felt I wanted to concentrate on drawing and tone and composition, anatomy, structure.

That was enough for me; and I knew that painting would be coming but I wanted to prepare myself for it. And I'm glad I did it that way because I was twenty-two when I left *The Advertiser* to concentrate on painting, and I was well-prepared to tackle the subject as an adult and make sure that the patterns of behaviour that I developed weren't going to hinder me later on. So I read widely, I spoke to Ivor, I knew what I wanted to do and I therefore progressed very quickly into oil painting.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

This is session two of an interview with Robert 'Alf' Hannaford for the National Library of Australia on 14th March 2007.

Alf, at the age of twenty-two you're thrown into, of your own choice, the world of art; but just listening to you it seems to me you'd not just become an artist in one sense but you'd become what most great artists are, and that's an observer of humanity. Would that be fair?

Yes, definitely. I used to think very deeply, and I still do, about art and life, and I never thought of myself as an artist first. I felt that we're on this planet and we're given this opportunity to observe and try and understand our predicament, and that has always been uppermost in my mind. And art has been a way for me, it's my natural way of expression, it's my natural way of understanding. I came into it as a child through love of drawing, but also a way of understanding the world, and that has been central to me, right through from childhood until today. But it's just one way. It has led the way for me, but it hasn't stopped my reading and writing and trying to understand other methods of living.

So, Alf, back at that period when you left *The Advertiser*, were you really caught up with the political nature of the times?

Not really. I was more an observer. I knew I was passionate about drawing and painting, and I didn't take part in Vietnam protests, for instance. I felt that my work was drawing. I did cartoons on it and I even did some after I left *The Advertiser* for various, more left-wing publications, I suppose. I did a few for the Wilderness Society. But no, I didn't become politically active. I kept in touch with what was going on and I became more incisive in my thinking about politics. (laughs)

How did your parents feel about that enlargement of your political thinking?

Well, we never quite understood each other politically. My parents are conservative, as most of the people from that neck of the woods are. I think County Light, in those days, was one of the most conservative districts in Australia. (laughs) And it was

almost like – I was always more left than they and we used to argue about it from time to time, always in good fun, in good humour.

Were you always drawn back to Riverton, in a sense?

Yes. It's the country that I love. And, I've got to admit, back to the people that I was brought up with and the people as well. But it's more the hills, the wilder parts that I came later to preserve. I got involved with conservation and that began back at Riverton and Kangaroo Island. So to me it was the hills, the creeks, the wild parts, the wilderness areas that I loved most and I wanted to extend and preserve ever since.

Now, Alf, what about your siblings? Did Don and Ian and your sister have a crack at you at this period, in the mid-'60s and have a bit of a go at what you were doing?

Oh, definitely. We're a family of very much having a go at each other, so I've always been the butt of especially my second brother Don's ridicule and scorn. (laughs) But it's always good-humoured, and I used to give him stick. But I'd never win with him, he always had a better turn of phrase and he was a little bit quicker than me with the right word. (laughs) So he not only demolished me physically – he was a lot bigger and stronger – but worked with words as well.

My older brother, Ian, was more of a mentor for me. There's almost five years between us and he took an interest in my artistic development – very much so, as a matter of fact. In fact, as a child he was a great inspiration. He encouraged me to go my own special way. And he himself had artistic leanings, he became an architect.

I was going to say this is the period when Ian's really beginning to do much of his formative work in architecture.

That's right. Yes, he went on from his football career into architecture, and he and I were very close. On an intellectual level as well. We'd write to each other as young men and I would discuss my every inner thought and aspiration with him, and vice versa, so we encouraged each other in those days – or he more encouraged me, because I was so much younger. And it was he, right at the very beginning, that I remember pointed out to me how the sky was not necessarily blue and a tree trunk was not necessarily brown and leaves were not necessarily green, and it opened my mind to the true, visual, objective view of nature, even in childhood, which has been central to my way of looking at things ever since.

You're a pretty amazing family, you know. Just thinking about it.

I don't know. Just, you know, you take your childhood and where you come from for granted. That's where I was brought up, and I feel very lucky to have a brother like Ian and Don and parents like I had and my younger sister, Kay, I fought with a lot. We were very different. But we used to draw together, which was important. And being a girl she added – well, I suppose, that feminine perspective, and she would talk to me and always has. Occasionally, whenever she is down or something, she comes to me, I'd like to think. And so she's been very important in my development. I suppose everybody says this about their family, immediate family.

Oh, no, they don't, Alf. It's quite – okay, they don't. (laughter) But one thing's interested me. You mentioned Sir Kenneth Wills being the stepfather of your future wife. How did all that you were doing in art either affect or assist your relationships with other people at the time, particularly with women? Was it all caught up in the same thing?

Interesting question, that. I've often thought about that. Because art is one of those things that seems to be very attractive to people. I've heard it said and I've read it that sometimes this whole thing about art and science or anything is at root a way of being attractive to the opposite sex or getting prestige in your group, so to speak. And I think there's some truth in that.

Yes, my artistic career was encouraged by my wife's family, both Sir Kenneth and Lady Wills were very encouraging to me and they had great hopes, I think, for me, when I look back. They saw me as a – they knew Ivor and they spoke with him, and I think they saw me as potentially a young artist of note – well, of talent, or what's the word? Not ambition; you know –

Potential.

– potential, that's the word I was looking for. And I drew them both and they introduced me to some of their friends and some of the first paintings I did were of friendships I'd met through their family. Dr Tostaven[?], for instance, was the first full-time, big painting I did in the early '60s, I did a drawing of him up in my little loft studio; and I remember Kate's mother – Mavis, Lady Wills – she came up into my studio and I drew her a couple of times. So yes, they were very encouraging.

Where had you met Kate?

She was the bridesmaid at my brother Ian's wedding. (laughs) And as we walked down the aisle – Kate is now dead; she died of breast cancer about ten years ago – she elbowed me and said, 'Wouldn't it be funny if we did this one day?' Now, she recalls that – she's not here now to contradict me; that's how *I* remember it. But I remember she said that I said it to her. (laughs) Anyway, we were attracted to each

other and from then on she was my girlfriend and right through my *Advertiser* days. I remember when Churchill died, for instance – – –.

No, hang on. There's a Ken Wills and *Advertiser* connection there, too, isn't there?

There is. He was on *The Advertiser*. I'm happy to say it had nothing to do with me getting my job. I got the job before I met Kate. But Ken was a director.

Yes, he was.

And I actually painted his portrait for *The Advertiser* in the 1960s, which is a painting I'm quite proud of – as I did Lloyd Dumas, who was managing director or whatever he was.

Yes, indeed.

And I did a few drawings of Lloyd. That was while I was still working at *The Advertiser*, before I'd got into painting. He got me to do one drawing for each of his daughters.

Oh! That's very interesting.

Anyway, where were we? (laughs)

We were talking about Kate, how you met her and all that.

Oh, yes. I was talking about how we – – –. I had a little Mini Minor – because I was pretty well-off in these days: I had a good job, I was paid as a grade one journalist, being a cartoonist, and I was only nineteen, so I was earning good money for my age and I was able to buy a little Mini Minor – and I used to take Kate out. And I remember when Churchill died we were going out and I had to wait until the news came through before I could submit my cartoon that he'd died, and indeed the news came through about ten o'clock so our date was (laughs) postponed until then.

Did Kate share a love of many of the things that you loved?

Yes. We both loved reading. Kate appreciated my work, she was very encouraging and sat for me so many times in those days, I did hundreds of drawings of her. We had a lot in common. We were both pretty competitive sports people – we used to pay tennis and table tennis and very full-on, life-and-death struggles. (laughter) She'd often beat me, or more often than not, on the tennis court. She was so consistent. (laughter)

When were you married, Alf?

We got married in '68, after I'd left *The Advertiser*, and I spent a year in Ballarat. We could come to that phase of my life now, perhaps.

Good.

When I left *The Advertiser* I really wanted to concentrate on oil painting, I wanted to really dedicate my – I had saved up quite a bit of money from this job, so I could live for at least a year without having to worry about earning money, so I decided to spend that year concentrating on developing my oil painting. Now, Ivor suggested how important it was to work from the model, and of course you had to pay models unless you had friends, as I did have a couple that would model for me, but he thought it would be a good idea perhaps to go to his friend, Geoff Mainwaring, in Ballarat. He ran the Ballarat Art School, where I could attend the life drawing classes and work from the model on a daily basis, as a way of getting into oil painting, and Geoff would be able to help me with any technical problems I had with oil painting.

So how do you spell his surname – sorry, Alf?

Mainwaring, M-A-I-N – – –.

I thought it was, I-N-W-A-R-I – – –.

That's right. He was one, he was bout Ivor's vintage, they went to art school together in Adelaide and were both official war artists during the Second World War.

Yes, I thought it was that one.

Geoff and I became terrific friends. I'd go to his place on weekends, it was usually a Sunday night, a permanent fixture, and we'd talk through till at least four o'clock in the morning, sometimes five or six, about art and everything under the sun, and we'd sometimes draw late at night and it was a very wonderful experience in Ballarat with Geoff. But it was terrific because I started – well, by then I was writing a daily diary and I used that to monitor myself with my studies. And I think, on looking back, that I progressed very rapidly into oil painting with that wonderful opportunity to paint and draw daily, writing notes to myself, analysing my work, talking with Geoff, and in one year I spent there I developed – I think I was able to stand on my own feet as an artist after that, and I started getting commissions immediately.

Was that word of mouth?

Word of mouth, always word of mouth. I'd done a couple – I mentioned Dr Tostaven; I did one for the first Chancellor of Flinders University; and then it wasn't

long before I got into Adelaide University; and through word of mouth I started getting commissions in Victoria and Adelaide.

Is this all portraiture?

Portraits and landscapes. I never stopped – I never thought of myself as a portrait painter and I still don't; I'm an artist. (laughs) Well, I don't even think of myself as an artist; I'm a studier of nature through painting, that's a better way of putting it. So I spend more time painting landscapes, I suppose, than I do with portraits and nudes and objects and anything that takes my interest.

And that's always been the case?

Always been the case, yes. So the Ballarat year was really inspiring. Ballarat I found a fascinating place, home of – Norman Lindsay lived up the way in Creswick, and I was interested in him. And that was a wonderful year. And then I came back; in '68 I returned to Adelaide specifically to get married. (laughs)

Sir Kenneth wrote me a letter while I was in Ballarat saying, 'Listen, old boy, what are you doing with my daughter? You're over there and she's here, and either you come home and get married or you let her off the hook', so to speak. (laughs) That's paraphrasing. But I thought it was a very funny letter. Anyway, I wrote it in my diary. I thought, 'Well, am I going to get married?' I didn't kind of believe particularly in marriage or certainly not in the religious side of it. And Kate wanted to get married so I thought, 'Yeah, that's a good idea', and I knew that she and I got on so well in every way, so I came home and got married.

So Sir Kenneth was thrilled, was he?

(laughter) Well, he thought I'd done the right thing. I'd forgotten to ask him, incidentally. He was a real stickler, you know, more English than the English. He'd been educated in London. And it never occurred to me to ask my girlfriend's father if I could marry her, (laughs) but he let it be known and I remember going along after we'd decided, anyway, asking him in the traditional way.

So where did you – – –?

But he was a lovely man, I admired him, and he was a terrific person to talk to about everything. He used to talk about the War, and he and I were great friends. And we also had a love of nature, he was a bird-watcher –

I didn't know that.

– oh, yes, he loved bird-watching and it was our closest contact, really.

That's broadened the gentleman to me even more.

Yes. I almost saved his life once. Down on Kangaroo Island – we used to go down there every year, I to paint, and live in Kate's brother's farm down at Antechamber Bay, and Kenneth and Mavis would go down in the holidays as well, so it was an annual, two-monthly thing. And one day I just dropped in on him as I was walking along; Mavis had gone up to Kingscote or back to Adelaide for the day, and he'd had a heart attack. I called the people up at the house and got the ambulance, air ambulance, a helicopter came down and took him back.

Now, those first years after you return to Adelaide and get married, where were you living at that point?

We rented a house in Tynte Street.

North Adelaide?

Tynte Street, North Adelaide. And again Ivor – I didn't realize how much Ivor had influenced me in those days – but he suggested I might apply for the, after I'd got back from Ballarat and I was still taking my work to him, that I might apply for the A.M.E. Bale Art Scholarship. Somebody had sent him information about it and he passed it on to me, he said, 'Have a look at this, you might be interested.' And it was the first A.M.E. Bale Art Scholarship, and it was for a so-called 'traditional' artist, had to be an Australian, had to be young, and I had to write an essay on traditional art, what I thought of tradition in art, and I had to present work to the trustees, who were William Dargie was one, John Rowell was another. Ernest Buckmaster was appointed but he'd just previously died, so another chap took his place – what was his name? An old still life painter. Anyway, I applied for that after I got married and won the A.M.E. Bale Art Scholarship. So Kate and I packed off in '69 to Melbourne, where the A.M.E. Bale Art Scholarship was situated. We had this beautiful old house where she had lived all her life in Kew with her studio. A.M.E. Bale was an artist in her own right, never married, but she was quite well-known in Australia. In fact, she's having a bit of a resurgence in interest in her work. In the 1930 exhibition in London she was represented with the ....., Streeton and Roberts and so on, and she was a good painter and a very charming, lovely, intellectual lady. She communicated with all the artists of the period and I felt again hugely privileged to win that first A.M.E. Bale Art Scholarship, to live in her house, use her studio, her library. And of course, as a young married couple, we had everything. We had all the money we needed, money was supplied for our living expenses, Kate was paid to be my housekeeper. (laughs) We had our first two children there. The Scholarship lasted

us for nearly four years. It was meant to only last two years, but the perpetual trustee company were pretty lax and they let us stay on. So that was a period of consolidation, I suppose you could call it. I worked very hard.

So who are your children, Alf?

Tom and Georgina were born in Melbourne – my eldest boy Tom in 1970 and Georgina in 1971. So that was a lovely experience for us. In those days, fathers weren't allowed to go to the birth, but I got really interested in the whole business and I went down to Monash University while Kate was pregnant and drew foetuses and studied it all up, as was my way, I suppose. And the St George's Hospital in Kew was walking distance from where we lived and I used to walk around there and draw babies in their first hours and days. Both of them I drew lots and lots of drawings of them, and many of Kate feeding and so on, so it was a constant source of artistic inspiration (laughs) as well as a wonderful event in our lives. And living in such wonderful surroundings – we were close to the River Yarra, I'd go down there drawing and painting and drawing the horses, that was before the freeway was built through.

No, I can picture that. That was a beautiful place.

Yes. And we had a huge garden and an old Victorian house with wonderful paintings in it, of great Australian painters. And I arranged I think it was a fortnightly discussion group there, and we had this beautiful old Victorian sitting room with great big cedar table and chairs and fireplace in Melbourne in winter, it was just wonderful. And we'd invite a guest speaker, anybody that really interested us, and had a nucleus of people and we'd discuss fascinating subjects. It was a very wonderful period in my life.

Were the people of Melbourne encouraging to you and Kate, if that's the way of putting it?

Yes. We had some really good friends, we met lots of people. Not so many artists, although I used to attend the Victorian Artists' Society, I'd draw from the model there twice a week. And I remember Charles Bush was there in those days, and he was a friend of Geoff Mainwaring so we kept in touch, and old Jock Frater was jumping around the place in Victorian Artists' Society. And I won my first prize there for a self-portrait that I had painted, and I think Kenneth Jack was the judge and he gave me first prize. (laughs) And with the money I bought a skeleton, which I suppose is indicative of the way I thought in those days, I bought a real-life skeleton from India – cheaper than the European skeletons – but I've still got that skeleton,

and I drew from it avidly. Part of my studies was anatomical, comparative anatomy always fascinated me.

So your pursuit of that part of your studies, did people in the medical world ever sort of block your way, or were you always allowed to pursue that?

I was allowed to pursue it, yes. I mean, I was inspired by I suppose reading Leonardo and Michelangelo. I used to cut bodies up myself, on the farm. When a sheep was killed I would take the eye and cut it open and be fascinated by looking inside bodies; and so I was keen to do that with human bodies, and I went to, got permission from Monash, and was able to look at the flayed bodies and draw from them.

From the cadavers themselves.

From the cadavers themselves.

Was Basil Hetzel there then, in those days, in public health?

I can't remember. I just – – –.

I think he was.

He could have been.

Was Foundation Professor. They were very advanced in much of their thinking there at the time in the Medical School.

Yes. So the comparative anatomy was really important to me. I was amazed at the beauty of the skeleton, for instance, and how it related to animal skeletons and how every bone is related, so to speak – like the humerus of an arm, for instance, is exactly the same shape as a bird's wing or a seal's flipper, with all the same digits, just adapted for different uses. And to me it seemed so obvious that we were all related and it was only there for the looking, so to speak, and it surprised me that the Theory of Evolution came so late in human history. (laughs)

I guess it took a long time to create a Charles Darwin.

Yes.

Sorry for the pun. This is a fascinating period in Australian history anyway, Alf, that we're talking about now through the '70s and very formative in many ways to where the nation's been taken. So you're in the heart of what's going on in Melbourne until 1973.

Yes.

Do you come straight back to Adelaide from there, or do you and Kate and the children travel for a time?

It was the heart of things in '73. One of our regular contributors to our discussion group, I remember, was John Gorton's son. He's a lawyer, and John Gorton was then Prime Minister. And I was starting to get commissions of important people as well. So I don't think I painted any Prime Ministers (laughs) or anything at that stage. But yes, we came back to Adelaide and I remember living in Melbourne, in the heart of Melbourne, loving the surroundings, loving everything about Melbourne – the cold weather, the fires – feeling no need to get out because we had a wonderful garden, I planted lots of trees, we had this huge old river redgum in proximity to the river. We used to go occasionally to the hills. But I had a yearning to get back to country, get back to –

The bush.

– the country, the bush where I came from. And so when we came back to Adelaide we went straight back to Riverton and rented a farmhouse with my two small children quite close to where I was brought up and I immersed myself in nature. I started seriously bird-watching, geology, especially all as related to my home district. It seemed sensible, if you're going to study the world, start where you live. (laughs) So I got geological books on our area; I read the human history – I got fascinated by the Aboriginal culture. And in those days there were no publications, other than what was kept in the records in the Museum, so I'd go along and trawl through the records and finding out information about the Ngadjuri tribe that lived in our district.

So art almost took a second place to – I never stopped drawing and painting, and I was even doing commissions and earning a living from it from then, but every moment I had seemed to be spent studying. I teamed up with a friend, John Smythe, who came from a – his brother was a zoologist, Rhodes Scholar, and John had huge knowledge of natural history, much more than I did, and I used to love going with him and we'd go camping, and everything I wanted to know he seemed to have the answer. I'd ask him about the geology, I'd ask him about the animals and the plants, and he knew all the names. He came from a family, his father was one of the first to conserve land in the district for conservation back in the '40s and '50s. And so again it was another hugely important period in my life where I realised my closeness to nature, I suppose you could put it, and how important the subject was in painting.

I'd be drawing the trees and having this fascinating understanding of how they evolved on the continent, from Antarctica, the Gondwanaland, and the species, and watching the way they varied according to soil types. I took an interest in geomorphology, because that seemed directly related to the landscape that I was

drawing – you know, the erosion, the way the rocks showed through and weathered over the centuries. I found in my own district ripple marks on top of the hills where I'd been brought up, denoting the time when the rocks were laid down over five hundred million years ago, Precambrian, and there were the ripple marks of the sea as it was then. So this gave me a heck of a lot to think about. And I would do charts of the history of the earth and the five thousand million years, and the five hundred million years of this later development apparent in the landscape where I lived, and the evolution of all the species, and of course I lamented the losses that had happened since white man had come and, coupled with my appreciation of the Aboriginal culture – and I lamented the loss of that culture, and I couldn't understand how the people of my district, my own forbears and brothers, were not interested, seemingly, in this culture that had thrived there for so many thousands of years.

I remember giving a talk while I was living there at that time to the local Lions Club and they knew that I was interested in natural history, they'd seen me roaming the hills and all that. So I talked about some of the evolution of the species around the place and I remember I concentrated on two or three species: one was the magpie and then, as one of the species that had disappeared, I talked about the Aborigines, and giving them my history and understanding of the culture and everything about them that I'd learnt. And at the end of the time, people asked me more questions about magpies and echidnas and things, but not one question about the Aborigines. I've always wondered what it is, this deliberate forgetting that is still in existence.

Had you ever read Gilbert White's *Natural history [and antiquities] of Selborne* at this time?

No.

So you didn't know that there had been other folk like you in other places who'd done very similar things?

No, I hadn't read that. I read lots of other books on natural history.

Did you read [Thoreau's] *Walden*?

Walden I read, yes, I liked *Walden*, that was a wonderful book. Thoreau, yes, that appealed to me immensely. And I would spend a lot of time camping on my own, thinking of Thoreau, perhaps. But yes, it was a wonderful time. And John and I would go to the Flinders every year, and he would help me carry my paints and we'd leave the car somewhere and we'd go off for up to a week or more with just peanuts

and raisins and we'd boil water in the creeks, we'd carry as much water as we could and we'd camp and he'd take photographs and I would paint, and we'd do that year after year. And our mutual love of natural history was central. The Flinders Ranges are just fascinating.

I was going to say it's been a Mecca for many artists, like David Dridan used to go there many, many times.

Did he?

Yes.

I thought David was more down in the South.

No, he used to go up with Windy Hill-Smith[?] two or three times annually.

I don't recall his Flinders paintings. Yes, but it has, for obvious reasons, it's a wonderful place. And of course the fascinating starkness of that landscape with all the rocks showing, there's hardly any topsoil up there, is just – you can see what Heysen loved about it. And he had an intuitive understanding of that basic structure, which fascinated me as a draftsman. And I've recently bought a place up at Parachilna and I like to go back as often as I can to draw and paint in the Flinders.

So you were pretty much – well, you were and are, I suppose is the way of putting it – consumed with this fascination with the natural world?

I was, and am.

So, Alf, how did Kate and the kids take this at the time?

Well, (pauses) Kate wasn't so much; it was more a thing I did with John Smythe. And we moved from Riverton then down to Kangaroo Island where we'd been holidaying at my brother-in-law's place, and it only continued down there. John would come down to KI and we'd walk around the island, we'd camp and study nature and draw and paint and he'd take photographs. And it became apparent that land came up for sale down there that was going to be bought by local farmers, and we lamented this. We hated the thought of it being cleared. So we tried to arrange the State Government to buy it, and they said they weren't interested, basically. They had enough conservation land on KI, you know – thinking of Flinders Chase, I suppose. So it was really cheap in those days, twelve dollars an acre, for virgin scrub on the south coast, so we thought, 'It's not beyond us, we can raise this money.' So we bought four thousand acres, approximately, of virgin scrub on the south coast of the Dudley Peninsula. Absolutely marvellous country, full of wildlife – echidnas, goannas, bird life, pristine – for between ten and twelve dollars an acre.

Now, I didn't have the money, but John was able to raise a bit more than me and, being so much in sympathy with each other, he said, 'Well, you can pay me with paintings', which I was very happy to do. So he put up the money, most of it; I was able to, every now and then I'd paint a couple of portraits and have enough to pay. And this wasn't huge money. So that has now turned into Bushland Conservation Company, that was over thirty years ago, and it's become one of the most significant companies in Australia. It won the Landcare award for conservation about five years ago, and in those days it was the only private company to take up that in-between land between privately-held and government.

National Park.

National Park. And people like Bob Brown knew of us before he started his similar scheme in Tasmania, which went on to Bush Heritage, which is a different form and now it's much bigger than us because they've got hundreds of members. But ours was a smaller company.

So it was just you and John, or more?

John and I started it. We bought our respective older brothers in to help pay for it originally. John's brother Michael, the Rhodes Scholar, he died of cancer; and my brother Ian came in for a few years but he pulled out. They were only minor contributors. And we got others to contribute money: whenever more land came up we'd try and persuade our friends and acquaintances to buy in, no less than five thousand dollars' worth. And the company has sort of reached its limit now. We've got fifty members, we've got land on Kangaroo Island and the Mid-North. Very significant land. It's been a wonderful company and it still is, and I'm unequivocally proud of my association with it. I put every penny I had into it in those days and I wish I'd put in more. (laughs)

Alf, were you aware of the Heritage in South Australia, with people like Samuel Dixon and S.A. White[?] and those who fought for Flinders Chase in the first place, did you know about that?

Yes, we had read – we were very keen readers on everything, especially John: he introduced me to a lot of that history.

So you're actually, in one sense you're carrying on a most amazing tradition.

Yes. We didn't quite think of that. We just saw it as stuff that had to be done at that time, and we had no idea we were starting a conservation company when we bought that original land on KI.

So were you actually living there at the time you bought it?

I was living there, yes.

And Kate and the children, you were all just at that place?

Yes. We lived in a little, what we called 'the top house', Fresh Fields on Antechamber Bay, and had a big natural lagoon nearby, and I used to go walking the beach, the lagoon, the rivers, the bush. It was a wonderful experience.

How long did you stay there for, Alf?

Well, we lived down there till '77. Kate and I separated in '77, from KI, really. I suppose I should explain what happened. I fell in love, (laughs) a girl that I met down there. No, I met her in Adelaide but she came to live on Kangaroo Island. And Kate and I – how can I put it? – we had a good marriage. We even kept in touch through this time. You've got to remember this is the 1970s. And anyway, the long and short of it was we parted in '77 and I lived with another girl, first in Melbourne, then in Adelaide, and Kate stayed on at KI and I rented a place again back in my Riverton district – over the other side of the hills this time – for a year with my new girlfriend, Fran. And that again was another fantastic period of my life although it had its obvious problems with lack of contact with my children and they missing me and me missing them, and they did come and stay with us but there were difficulties with broken marriages, as there usually are. But Kate and I were able to keep – we had huge respect and love for each other which remained until she died many years later. We became very close, and I'm sure that helped our children as well through all that time. We never became vindictive and I gave her my share of the house that we'd bought in Adelaide and we never went through courts or anything like that, and I used to go and stay there when she went away, look after the house; and the kids would stay with me. So I'd like to think that we did that transition as well as could be done, but – – –.

Did Kate ever remarry?

Yes, she did, she remarried a few years later and lived here, in this particular house.

Oh, okay.

Come to that, I suppose – – –.

So this is a period where you have a new relationship with a woman, Fran, whom you'd met in Melbourne, did you say?

Well, I met her in Adelaide. She came from Melbourne. Met her in Adelaide, and she also moved to Kangaroo Island – not because of me, but for other reasons, her boyfriend. And we kept in touch with each other and a relationship, a very strong relationship, developed between us and it was another turning point, I suppose, in my life, the nature of that relationship. It was a time of great emotional, artistic development. I of course painted her, and she was an artist herself. So we had a wonderful year at Riverton renting a farmhouse. In those days I hardly had any money. I was still getting commissions, but it was a pecular time in a way. I'd been involved in nature and now here I was living with another girl; and luckily for me commissions kept coming through and I was able to support myself and my family.

And my artistic development never stopped. But I guess when I first started living with Fran I can remember I was so taken up with this relationship that I didn't paint as much, and it was possibly one of the reasons (laughs) we parted a year later, when I got back to much more work and long periods of painting. And she was quite a bit younger than me – I don't suppose it's of great interest why we parted, but we did, a year later. And then, just to round out that little story, about seven years later she came back to Adelaide for a while and we resumed our relationship, quite powerfully again, for a very short time and she became pregnant, and so I now have a twenty-one year-old daughter living in Melbourne. She married twice, other people. And I would like to have lived with her once I realised she was pregnant, but she went back to an old boyfriend and had another child with him, then that broke up. But we've kept in touch, too, and my daughter, Aisha, is a wonderful daughter and we communicate as much as we can, and she recently married and had a child. And it's like a wonderful gift to me to have this daughter that I didn't actually bring up as a small child, unlike my other three, but yeah, we've got a lot in common despite it all.

So I'm just thinking of this period of the late '70s, early '80s, Alf, it's full of emotional turmoil for you in some ways and artistic turmoil as well, I suppose. But it's all caught up in just you being you and doing the things you've always done.

Yes. In retrospect it all seems like grist to the mill. I was reading a lot of philosophy in those days. When we broke up I was devastated – Fran and I – and I spent a long time (laughs) examining my situation, asking myself how it came that I was so hurt and how it came that I – – –. What was this thing called 'love', that could throw you so off your kilter, so to speak? And I started reading, and I found Buddhist philosophy very interesting on that score, of understanding the self and our desires and our motivations and the concept of who we are, so to speak. And married with what I'd read in Western philosophy I took a great interest in all that at that time. I

read a lot, I wrote a lot – I was writing a diary daily of my inner life, I suppose, trying to understand such things, looking at myself and reflecting on what was happening around me, what causes human beings to behave the way we do, get caught up, why we follow religions, why we follow philosophies. It seemed to me then that I was caught in some personal philosophies which I've tried to abandon, I suppose, or understand through my reading of those times, and I see a parallel with what humans generally have done throughout history.

By this time were you getting quite significant commissions, in terms of portraits and others?

Yes. Those commissions kept on coming through word of mouth. I was painting for universities, bigger institutions like the Royal College of Surgeons in Melbourne, the Geelong College, for instance, I did quite a number of portraits down there from the '70s. I'd already painted Sir Donald Bradman for Lord's Cricket Ground and Dame Joan Sutherland, back in the '70s. These are the early '70s. But I wasn't thinking of myself as becoming, I wasn't interested in the art world as such; I was exploring life, understanding it, I was being paid for it, so I had no desire to get myself known. In fact, journalists would sometimes seek me out for some reason or other if I'd painted a portrait, and I'd say no. I'd say, 'No, I'm not interested.' To me the art world seemed crazy, at that time when you couldn't help but notice what was going on – you know, the Hard Edge Schools and the Pulp and all that – it seemed to me so uninteresting compared with what I was doing in studying science and nature together through art, seemed far more relevant than the art world of those days and I only took a passing interest. Although I did take a huge interest in the Modern Movement – you know, Picasso, Duchamp, artists like that fascinated me and I was a great lover of Van Gogh and I could understand what Cézanne was trying to do and felt affinities with it. So it wasn't just the Realistic art of my own work that interested me.

This might be the time to ask this question: do you think that the 'art world' is a bit obsessed with the present all the time and in fact has a – well, this is my view coming out – has an arrogance about its importance at a given time that doesn't take note of what you've just been talking about?

I think the art world is obsessed with the individual artist and obviously there's been a lot of money's involved, prestige is involved, and I think it's a great distraction for a young artist to feel that it's a way into their identity and so on. And art in the last century or so has got further away from the study of the object, which has always interested me, and more into the idea of the artist as genius and the bally-hoo around the artist. I'm not putting it into words very well. But I was repulsed by all

that, and I still am. My interest is in nature, the preservation of it, the conservation is central, and I think we live in a world where we've got to change our ways, otherwise we're going to lose this wonderful world of nature. We *are* losing it: species are disappearing, and I've been conscious of that since my early days, and it's just got worse, it's speeding up still; and to me these are the relevant questions, and the antics of the art world seem so stupid and irrelevant compared with those issues, and I want to address them personally. I want to do something – and I always have – to preserve, to ensure that we can retain this beautiful world rather than destroy it. (laughs)

Alf, all that aside – I don't know whether I should have asked that or not, but that's a personal interest of mine – you begin to paint the portraits of some what you'd call significant Australian individuals, men and women. In your pursuit of painting them, did you really have to in a sense do a biographical study of them, eye to eye?

Eye to eye, yes. But I've never taken much interest in their lives – unless we talked about it, and often we had fascinating discussions and I learned a lot from people's lives – but it's not necessary for me when I'm painting somebody to know what they've done and all that, even though sometimes they think I should.

Often I've painted people and never even grasped their name, let alone what they did. It's a visual thing that sets me going and not so much what I know; in fact, that part gets shut out in the painting process and I think for good reason. And if I retain that visual way of seeing, I find when I look at the painting at the end I've said a lot more about that man or woman than I even knew. People say, 'Ah, you've captured my melancholy', and I wasn't even aware of it, or, 'I can see my father in that one', and I've never seen his father, that kind of thing. And that comes through the purely visual.

The observer – we were talking about that earlier, is that the observation?

Yes. Yes, the observation, and what – – –. That's why I find this practice of painting so fascinating. It's not to end up with a painting and join the art world so much; but what the process of painting does, how it shows you the rhythms or it exposes them, sometimes very slowly, certain rhythms and depths of awareness that you had no idea about when you first saw the subject – for instance, a portrait or a landscape: you look at it and day after day you try to capture its light, its form. You seem to delve deeper and deeper into its basic understanding, its basic qualities, its form, its shape, how it changes with the light; and suddenly – sometimes – you see amazing rhythms that you were unaware of or amazing, you know, to do with the composition, the fact that you're painting it. I think the act of painting makes you

see colour, shape and tone, the act of putting it down and the concentration necessary for it clears the mind of subjective thoughts so suddenly the landscape or the face or whatever can appear fresh, as if you're looking at something for the first time. And you can imagine what it must be like to look at a human face if you've never seen one before, how fascinating it is; and you do get that feeling sometimes. Through the act of painting. It's a very strange thing and I don't want to get precious about it or use New Age jargon – which I abhor; I like to think I'm a practical, down-to-earth person – but there's something transforming sometimes in that process of painting. I guess that's why you never get sick of it and I continuously do it. And even though I can see the necessity to get out and fight on the barracks these days for global warming or something like that, painting still is my first love and perhaps even relevance, I'm just better at it than I am at those other things. (laughter)

END OF DISK 2: DISK 3

This is the third session of an interview with Robert 'Alf' Hannaford on the 14th March 2007. Apologies for that glitch, Alf.

That's all right.

You were talking about the fact that you'd had the break-up with Fran and that you'd come into a different understanding.

Yes. It really did shake me to the core, and it made me read philosophy perhaps with (laughs) more intent than I had previously, and more understanding. The central philosophy of Buddhism did fascinate me, and the notion of *shunyata*, which is emptiness, gelled with my understanding that I'd already come up against in painting – not against; with – that I discovered that my best painting was done sometimes when it seemed I hadn't had a thought in my head, it was like my hand was moving and my eye was very much alive. And I could see the resonance with Buddhist philosophy there of *shunyata*, that notion of emptiness, that notion that some people call 'meditation', when one is fully alive but acting in a greater way than through the thinking brain, if you know what I mean. So that whole notion fascinated me at this time, late '70s. It even influenced my painting. I'd be less analytical.

I worked with a friend of mine called Anselm van Rood and we would go to the zoo, he was interested in the same philosophical questions as myself and had studied art overseas and lived in London, where he came from, and he'd lived in South America. So he and I became great friends and we just clicked on a level of being able to discuss very personal things plus very intellectual things, and it's a friendship that has continued to this day. But we worked together and developed this notion of

drawing–seeing, without the mind intervening, (laughs) if you could put it in very simplistic and probably not-quite-accurate terms, because at one level I know you cannot divorce your subjectivity, there's always a gap. But we tried, anyway, to draw what the eye saw and what the hand provided, and we did this solidly for years. We'd go to the zoo every day and meet there and go and draw the animals, and I was fascinated by Anselm's drawings. He didn't have an understanding of the animals or the knowledge of anatomy and everything that I had, and yet sometimes he could draw one of the animals which was familiar to me but not to him in a way that really amazed me, and it was purely from this clarity of vision, of divorcing his mind, if I could put it that way, his subjectivity, and what came through – not every time; often, more often than not, it was a mess – but occasionally something amazing would come through, something fresh, something that had never been seen before or put down before, I thought.

And that became very central to my approach to painting, and has ever since: the idea of vision, the way of seeing as if freshly, as if for the first time. It also gelled with what I had known of Constable. He articulated that same desire and understanding.

Ah, yes. There was a period there where through – Anselm and I, we discovered we wanted to express our – we actually met at a Buddhist meditation weekend in the Adelaide Hills where it was silence for the whole weekend, we couldn't speak to each other. We met by accident a day or two later, after the show, just here in Gilberton, and we recognised each other, went up and spoke to each other and became great friends. We went back, talked about our mutual understandings, and we had a very similar track record, he in another country. So I don't know quite where that was leading. I guess I'm building up to this period where I eventually went overseas, for the first time in my life, in 1981.

Previous to that I'd always thought – oh, no; I was building up to tell you about the meditation groups we did.

Anselm and I, we became interested in the Rajneesh group because of the physicality, I thought, of their dancing. Rajneesh seemed so diametrically opposed to the notions of Christianity and so forth that were dominant in our society and believed in kind of free expression and some of which seemed to gel with our understanding of Buddhism which was also central to his philosophies. So we looked around and found this group in Adelaide that were practising Rajneesh meditations. So we both rode our bikes down there and at 6 a.m. in the morning we'd do dynamic meditation, which was a wonderful thing. I love the physicality of everything, painting and dancing. And the notion, I think, was that through physical activity the

aftermath would be a process of real relaxation where meditation was more likely, and we indeed found that did happen. And I used to read the books, too, which were interesting, philosophically, because Rajneesh had a wide knowledge of Eastern and Western philosophy. But I never became a follower, I hasten to add, as I'm afraid Anselm did for a while. I found the 'guru' type approach anathema. It seemed to me that Rajneesh, he'd talk a lot of sense and then he'd talk about following the guru, which seemed senseless to me, absolutely absurd, so I was always sceptical of that.

But those friendships I made through that particular group and the – how can I put it? – the way of dancing and living life freely – – –. We lived together in a communal situation down at that centre and, for a country boy like myself [to whom] dancing meant nothing and nudity and so on were unusual, I found it liberating to live with people where we walked around in the nude and danced and expressed intimate ideas. The notion of the encounter group – this was '70s – was very strong in those days and some of those encounter groups, even though I can laugh at some aspects of them today, they were very powerful indeed when somebody would obviously break through barriers to admit to something in their personality or something that caused them grief, and your heart would go out to them. I remember one chap, for instance, saying how he liked dressing up in women's clothes, and you could see the pain, the barrier that he had to break through to admit this. And of course everybody (laughs) thought it was funny and they'd all laugh and put their arm around him, and then you found you could uncover your own deepest, deepest fears because others were doing it. And I found that a very liberating experience and, while I've always regretted the notion of exclusivity and everything associated with such movements, I've got to admit that some of those techniques were of great value.

Anyway, in 1981 I decided to do my first trip overseas. I was pretty free, and I had avoided it up until then because I was so interested in drawing and painting and working that I felt no need for it, I felt I had everything in hand here in Australia. I had close associates – artists like Ivor and Hans Heysen and Anselm – that were stimulating; I had access to all the overseas work through books and so on. But I decided to make this trip in '81, so I decided to go somewhere that seemed so opposite to everything that I knew, so I determined to go to India. And that was a most amazing trip in my life.

I flew out hoping that I'd meet someone on the plane or something to give me an indication what to do, but I arrived in Bombay, the old Bombay Airport, at four o'clock in the morning and I was just transported into another world. (laughter) And do you want me to talk a little bit about those experiences?

Yes, please.

Well, first thought that comes in, I remember flying over India, looking out and seeing all these millions of lights over this dark continent, and up above there was the Milky Way and they were like the same, and they must have been little fires, and I realised what a strange world I was coming into.

And in Bombay – I didn't meet anyone on the plane, and so I sort of was dropped out. I knew nothing. I hadn't prepared myself. I had travellers' cheques and –

A passport.

– passport and I clutched them to myself, and I had a bag. And I thought, 'What in the hell am I going to do now?' And it was four o'clock in the morning and I was besieged by beggars and people trying to take my bags and offer me a board or ride into town. So eventually somebody gave me a card and I thought, 'Well, that's something, he's at least got a name', so I took the card, grabbed it and followed him, and he took me out to a little van out the back somewhere of the airport. I'd changed a little bit of money, I was able to do that, got a few rupees. I don't know how much I got, I didn't know what I was doing, I just got a handful of money. Anyway, I clutched everything to myself and we got into this van. I remember there were two of them sitting in the front and the doors were flapping on the back, and we drove through the streets of Bombay. I thought, 'Where am I? What have I come to?' And I looked out the window and I could see bodies sleeping along the side of the road. There were bloody – darkness, this was meant to be the middle of Bombay but there were swamps and little tracks and little byways, and wherever, there were people lying on the road, sleeping, four o'clock in the morning. And we eventually rocked up at this weird, old hotel and, believe it or not, at four o'clock in the morning or five by then, out came this guy with epaulets on his shoulder – looked like a dirty old lion tamer or something, all greasy and braid – and welcomed us to this hotel. This is what I'd got myself into.

I paid the taxi men and again another Indian couple came running up, wanted to grab my bags, and I think I let my bag go at one stage and they carried it up, and they wanted money, *baksheesh*, so I gave them a handful of coins that I'd got, I don't know how much it was, and by the look on their faces I think I'd grossly underpaid them. Anyway, after that I decided to hang onto my own luggage, and this lion tamer (laughs) led me upstairs and ushered me into this grimy little room, and I was alone and so relieved. And I don't think I slept a wink. But I remember outside the window I heard a pigeon cooing, and I felt such a strong affinity with that bird

because it's the domestic pigeon which is ubiquitous, really, and I felt that little link with home.

I stared, looking out the window the next morning, and I remember looking down and seeing a bullock cart go by. Then there were little huts visible with drains around them and pigs in the drains, and kids playing – this was out the fourth-storey window. I remember there was a church came out of the heavy atmosphere: I saw a cross and thought, 'That's unusual.' Well, I didn't know – everything was unusual. But then a Rolls Royce went down the street, and many more bullock carts and people wandering, and I was there for hours. And then eventually I noticed palm trees, the fog must have cleared a bit, and I realised we were on the sea. Anyway, it must have been about ten o'clock in the morning I bucked up the courage to walk downstairs, and I ran into this Australian in the hotel. And so I gravitated to him and I said – and he was about my age; he had a young family with him. And he said, 'Ah, look, come with me, mate. I know what, I've been here plenty of times.' So I said, 'Oh, thanks. And first of all I'd better get a bit of money.' So he took me and showed me how to change the money, gave me a bit of info on the money exchange and what a rupee was and tralalala, so I started to feel relaxed and confident. And I remember we walked outside the hotel compound. I remember I paid seventy rupees, which is about seven dollars. I was there for two months and I never paid more than thirty after that.

And outside the compound there was a guy dying. I could tell because of my knowledge of sheep: the ground was worn under him and I knew that he was on the last legs. He reminded me of a sheep, that you can always tell how close to death they are. And as I came back that night he *had* died. There was a little bowl there, a few people were putting things in it for him to keep him alive.

Anyway, I followed this guy. We got into crowds, we went on trains, and he was a tough little nut. He was a builder's labourer from the eastern states, and he used to travel once a year overseas and he'd stop off in Bombay on the way home. He knew all the chemist shops in Bombay to find condoms – the non-slippery variety – which he would get some hashish very cheaply, wrap up little nodules of hashish in two condoms and swallow them, before returning to Australia where he reckons he'd make about six thousand dollars to pay for his trip. So this was his game, but he was prepared – – –. Nice little bloke, I got on well with him. But he did know Bombay very well. But he had an aggressive attitude which I realised right at the beginning was not my way. He'd fight for his place in the train – I could see his little white arm with the muscles tensed – whereas I went more with the flow. (laughter) And I

started to love everything about India, just everything. And I spent the day with this guy.

We got lost on the way home, incidentally, mainly because – we went into the city, we smoked a joint, which possibly helped in my understanding and my immediate love of the country. I felt totally at home, totally – – –. I remember, we were staying at a place, we got back to Juhu Beach, where I happened to be staying, that hotel happened to be, and I walked on my own. I'd lost contact with this guy by now – we'd got lost on the way home due to his aggressiveness, I think (laughs) – and I found I could relate to everybody, the Untouchables to the Brahmins, and it was just like being in another world. Most extraordinary sights. And Indian people look you right in the eye and want to know who you are and what you're doing, and through every strata of that very stratified society. I felt I was privy to every element of it.

I stayed in Bombay a couple of days before heading out by train. I had friends in Adelaide that had told me about Rishikesh up in the mountains, and I headed out. And I also checked in at Poona on the way, where Rajneesh was still in residence, and I had friends from Adelaide from the Rajneesh group that were there and I stayed there a few days. And that was absolutely fascinating, too. I did a couple of meditation groups and it was really interesting to observe that community. And then I got dysentery – oh, God, I'm giving you a day-by-day description of my life here; I'd better quicken it up. But the long and short was I got out of Poona and headed north through Agra to the mountains, Rishikesh, and India was just a revelation – socially; artistically.

I drew all the time. I met some fascinating people. I met one guru-type person through a Brahmin that I met on the track up in the mountains and he introduced me to his guru. He used to come down from the mountains, and he happened to be just the most articulate, who'd studied Krishnamurti and all the people that I had, and we had really in-depth discussions about Buddhism and Indian philosophy, and I found it just very inspiring. And I determined then not to smoke any more dope, (laughter) because I had been doing a bit in India, which was more or less 'In Rome, do what the Romans are doing', because up there marijuana is smoked by everybody – hashish, I mean – especially the old men, and they sit around like we smoke cigarettes here, they would sit around and invite you over and you'd *boom shankar*, you know, you'd have a chillum, and they'd pass it round and it was normal life. You'd look out the window and you'd see people carrying stacks of marijuana on their shoulder, and it grew on the sides of the roads. But I decided after meeting with this guy and realising that my lungs are not very good at smoking anyway, to

stop smoking; and indeed I was glad I did because India was even more amazing after that.

I spent two months in India. I went to Nepal, back to India, and I felt a real kinship for the land. It was the people, I don't know why. I remember arriving back from Nepal by air, and I remember I almost felt like kissing the ground to be back in India. I stayed that night in the Delhi Airport Hotel, and I remember there was a dormitory of black people – Indians – lying next to me, and I felt such closeness to them. I thought, 'Oh! India. It's so good.' And I saw this black man's leg and ankle, and I remember thinking, 'How wonderful.'

So this was at Delhi?

Yes, Delhi.

Did the housing come right up to the runways in Delhi like it did in Bombay, in the old airport?

I don't remember that. No, I don't remember that. I have the impression that it was a newer type of airport than the old Bombay Airport. By the time I left India they'd moved airports, (laughs) and one weird thing was when I got back I went to the old airport – with my last cent, last money – to get to fly out, and it had packed up and I had to inveigle the poor taxi driver to take me free of charge, which he did, back to the new airport to get out of India. But wonderful stories, marvellous experiences, and for my first trip out of the country it was the most amazing, life-changing experience.

So what did that journey give you in terms of understanding of art and painting?

Understanding of life, more than art and painting. You know, it reinforced my view that life's (laughs) more important than art. I mean, I wanted to immerse myself – I drew, rather than painted, in India. No, I really can't answer that better than that. It was a life-changing thing, it reinforced my notion of closeness and drawing from life, which I'd been doing, and I just wanted to do more and more of it. I left highly inspired with drawing, when I left for England after that trip. And I got to England and strangely found England just as fascinating as India.

So you went from India to England.

I couldn't believe that people could be so blasé about travelling. To me, travelling was the most amazing thing in my life.

So, Alf, you went from India to England direct?

Yes, direct. Got off at the airport at Heathrow in my Indian clothes into a cold climate and they immediately thought I was carrying drugs because I had a beard and wacky-looking clothes, so they took me aside where I was able to find a jumper and then I was all set for England. I'd bought a japara, and that covered my – – –. So England was where I set out hitchhiking and looking around for a month, and I headed for – well, I just found the whole thing fascinating. I stayed with friends in London and went and saw the museums and the art galleries to see the paintings first-hand that I'd been studying all my life, was a huge experience. Then I headed for the Lake District and I spent a couple of weeks walking through there, camping and painting watercolours. I walked from one end of the Lakes right down to Morecambe Bay in the south. I felt as if I was on top of the world and I could walk right across England, it was so small compared to Australia. (laughs) I couldn't believe the size of the place. I put my thumb out and I'd hitchhike from there up into Scotland, and then I felt I could walk from one side of Scotland to the other. I went as high as Inverness, and then I went to – well, I won't go into all the details, but it was just wonderful. The Isle of Mull.

So again, this continued the eye-opening?

Eye-opening, nature-loving, drawing, painting. Philosophically, too, again, unbelievably, I found myself walking past Ruskin's house and I'd read Ruskin, of course. And then the great Barbizon painters. I did go to France for a week as well. In France, and the philosophers of France. I realised that my culture that I'd taken on through living in South Australia, how heavily-influenced by French art and philosophy it was; and of course Wordsworth and those poets and thinkers of England, the nature. I walked through their district – I went past Wordsworth's cottage purely by chance. So I had a wonderful feeling that I'd entered the roots of humanity in India and in England. You know, you'd walk through parts of England and I'd say, 'What's that up north? What are those mounds?' And they were old Druid mounds. Saw stone circles and I went to Stonehenge and drew those rocks, and I really loved that feeling of history and humanity. I felt I was delving back into my own cultural and human history in that trip.

Were you in touch with friends and family in Australia while you were away?

I wrote constantly to my mother, which was a funny thing to do. I had no idea I'd do that. But I started writing – I kept my diary going, and I'd write my thoughts and things. And I felt so glad I was alone and not with a partner, (laughs) like so many of my acquaintances were at that time, because I had a freedom that they didn't seem to

have, to go where the whim let me. And I wrote a series, almost daily letters to my mother of my experiences during that time, and they were just as remarkable in England as they were in India.

So three months was the total time you were away?

Three months, yes.

When you came back to Adelaide, did you find your eyes were seeing things differently?

Yes. Well, coming back from England, the first thing I noticed was the clarity of the sky and the atmosphere. I noticed it amazingly. And then how unpopulated Adelaide was. You'd look up the street and there was nobody there, whereas in India I was used to seeing millions of people everywhere you looked.

With that clarity of the sky that you saw, did you ever think of Streeton and Roberts and McCubbin and the Heidelberg people who had that same insight?

I did. I did, and I had great sympathy and felt very close to them. And indeed that's what I did: I went out and painted the landscape, very much in the same spirit, trying to capture the light, the tone, the shape, the true vision of Australia as I saw it, which I thought was a little bit different to them as well – at least as far as subject matter and possibly even technique.

Sorry to have interrupted you. So you come back and you see things clearly again. Were you straight into commission work?

I was. I was straight back into commission. I decided my marriage was – we were separate.

That's you and Kate?

That's Kate and I. And for a short time I rented a house near her so I'd be near to the kids. And then when I got back from overseas I decided I needed to set up a studio, I couldn't work without a studio, because I was accumulating lots of work and a lot of my work entailed going back through drawings and everything. I could work out of doors for months, but I needed a space to work on sculpture and drawing and painting. So in those days prices were – I was completely ownership free, I didn't own anything, and I thought I'd stay that way for the rest of my life. My real desire was to paint and I thought, 'I'll rent, not have the bothere of ownership.' But rents had just started to go up in the early '80s, '81, and I found if I wanted a studio and a place to live I'd end up paying more than I could by buying myself a house, and that's what I found. Friends led me to a house in Hindmarsh and first thing I noticed was

the lovely light coming through a south window, and I immediately saw that if I knocked one wall down I could have a beautiful studio. And it was thirty thousand dollars, which meant I could borrow – I had ten thousand dollars from a couple of portraits that I'd just painted on return, so I put that money down as a deposit, borrowed twenty, which was, I think it was sixty dollars a week that I paid, which was a lot cheaper than the hundred and twenty I would have had to pay to rent at that time. So I bought this place and I've never regretted it. I paid it off, as a matter of fact, within a year or two. I had an exhibition down at David Dridan's which sold well, I got more portrait commissions, and paid off the twenty thousand in a year or two, by which time the price had gone up to about sixty. So it was (laughs) – I was suddenly a land owner, property owner, against my philosophy.

You'd joined your forebears, I think.

I did. And I regret – or I don't know how to put it, but I've bought more since. (laughter)

Obviously India did more for you than you knew. Or it was the bloke with the epaulets, one of the two.

Yes.

So were you surprised by some of the commissions you began to get through the '80s? Because they began to devolve around politicians and senior figures in universities and that type of thing?

No, I wasn't surprised. I'd been getting good commissions right through, and they just kept coming. And they have every year. We had a recession and all the rest, and I didn't notice it. I've kept my price related to the portrait price and the price of my other painting, and I've never had to go down in price, (laughs) so there's been a gradual increase over the years. And I was able to, after I'd bought my house and paid it off, I had some really lean times where I thought I might have to sell – I'd bought a Heysen drawing in the '60s and I really didn't want to sell that but I thought I would have to at that time. But I tried to sell it through Dridan and he offered me too little for it, and I'm so glad I hung onto it. And a year or two after that I really haven't been broke since. By that time, as I said, my house went up in price. Then, late '80s, I bought a place in the country, '86, and I thought I'd have to sell my house but I didn't, I was getting more commissions and putting my price up. Financially I've been in a pretty good situation ever since, doing the thing I love most, which is painting a portrait commission.

I love it not just because it's painting a human being, but it's painting, and I have to finish it in the sitter's time. One week is all I can allow, which is a really good

time. You put everything aside when you paint a portrait, and I feel so grateful to be able to do what I love and then get well paid for it, which gave me the wherewithal to go out and paint landscapes or nudes or still lives, whatever else I wanted to do, or pursue other interests in reading or relationships without having to worry about money.

Was the relationship thing very important to you?

Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely relationship, relationships. I've always kept in contact with people that I've had relationships with – well, it's a hard word to describe: there are male relationships, female; but I'm talking about the female people that I had a sexual relationship with I've usually kept in contact, as I did with my wife. I suppose it's one of those things that, when you're involved with painting, you don't take human social values in quite the same light. I didn't believe in marriage. So much goes with when people say 'relationship' – what do they mean? Sexual relationship, or living with somebody? But when you come to think of it, all contact between us is relationship, isn't it?

Yes, it is. I was thinking about coming back to that point you made earlier about the house we're having this interview in, and that this was Kate's house.

Yes, this was our house. We bought it in early '70s when we got back from Melbourne, and I planted all these trees here and I built the studio, before we went to Kangaroo Island, and then later we broke up and I left my half of it to Kate, who passed it on to our daughter, George, who lives now on Kangaroo Island and she's been renting the place. This year her tenant moved out and I have a relatively new relationship, with Alison[?], and we decided we wanted –

Alison, yes.

– we decided we wanted to live together. Previously, I was living with my youngest daughter down at Hindmarsh, where my studio is, and she was living with her eldest daughter in Norwood. So we decided this would be a great opportunity to live together and it's liked turning a circle. I've come back here quite unexpectedly to live in the house that Kate and I bought, and it was such a wonderful place to live in in the '70s and here I am back again.

And it's now your daughter's house that you're – – –.

It's now my daughter's house and I'm paying her rent. (laughter)

Gosh, father, that really makes you think, doesn't it?

It does, it does. But it's so beautiful here on the river.

Is there anything – I mean, obviously Kate's death would have affected you whatever, because of your friendship that lasted beyond the marriage, if you like.

Yes.

Was that a particularly difficult time for you, or did you feel that you just wanted to be there at the time?

Her death?

Yes.

Yes. I did spend a lot of time with her in her last months, particularly. As she got ill, we were able to talk about the things closest to her. She had just remarried, but unfortunately she wasn't able to discuss some things, especially about dying and everything, with her husband. Now, he's a good man and they've had a good relationship. So I think I took that role in her life for a while, and I was there the moment she actually died. And it was quite an amazing experience because she'd been in a coma for about a week, it seemed like a coma – people were talking over her at her bed and friends would come in and someone was there all the time – and I remember I held her hand one day and I said, 'Kate, if you can feel this, raise your left eyebrow.' And up went her eyebrow. The hairs also went up on the back of my neck. I thought, 'That's amazing.' I didn't know whether she'd heard and understood or whether it was some biological response. I asked her to do it again and she did it again. And so I rang my daughter, George, who was very close to Kate, and she'd just gone home for an hour or two, and she said she'd come back right in. She had something to do and she was going to come back in an hour or two. And then she rang again later and said, 'How is Kate?' And I said, 'Well, I think she's – as you're asking me', I said, 'hang on a minute. I think she's just died.' As indeed she let out a breath. She'd stopped breathing on numerous occasions over the last few days, but this time I knew. There was this long letting-out of breath and a little bit of fluid came out of her mouth and I could see that she had died while George was on the phone. And she came in immediately.

I had drawn Kate in those last few days, this woman that I'd loved and drawn as a young woman, and here she was ravaged with cancer, breast cancer, and that was a very moving experience for me to do those drawings and be with her there. And as we were like partners for so long, it always – I still think of her quite often as she's like the other half, in a way, and often I think, especially with my grandchildren arriving after she died, how much she would have loved them and I often think what

a pity she's not here. And I measure a lot of things with her in mind, as far as my own life is concerned.

Alf, the last decade or so, I don't quite know how to ask this question, but you yourself – what is it, two years ago the throat cancer came?

Yes.

On the tongue, wasn't it?

Yes. One year ago.

One year ago.

Yes.

How did that affect you? I mean, while this is the story of yourself in biography I think it's probably right that I should ask that.

Yes, in relation to Kate and everything, yes. Well, it's hard to know. But I've been asked a little bit about this lately. A couple of reporters, with that painting that I put in the Archibald, it was picked up. I painted myself with tubes, the feeding tube into my stomach which I had to have after radiotherapy. And I have thought about it, and I kept a diary, which some of it (laughs) was even quoted in the paper. But I think I handled it really well. I never felt depressed. I was prepared to die, I think. It did occur to me that I could die this year, last year. I thought of Kate. I thought I was grateful for the ten years more that I'd had – you know, she'd died at fifty-two; I was only sixty-one when I got cancer, and I basically felt, 'Well, I've had an extremely good life.' I wasn't saying, 'I'm going to die'; I naturally hoped that some way we'd get through and I'd be operated and unlike Kate I would see it through.

But I've always been interested in death and decay and ageing and all those things, it comes up all the time in portrait painting. I remember my daughter in Melbourne, Fran's daughter, asked me once what my main thoughts were, a couple of years previous to my diagnosis, and I said – being honest, I said, 'Well, to be quite honest, I think about death a lot.' And she was horrified. And I said, 'But don't be horrified. It's a positive thing. It gives me more of an appreciation for life.' (laughs) Anyway, when this cancer came, in a funny sort of a way I was prepared. I haven't suffered a moment of depression or regret or 'why me?', which I notice other cancer patients do, probably because I'd thought so much about it and knew how transitory life is anyway and confident (laughs) in the notion that we all do die. And I did have a regret at kind of leaving this wonderful life a little bit early, like being at a party and having to go home early – (laughs) as my wife Kate would appreciate that very much, she was a great party girl.

So, Alf, just listening to you talk today, and I don't mean to butt in on this one, but it just seems to me that it goes right back to Riverton for you, doesn't it: your early days with your father and mother and understanding the land through the animals there, the sheep dying or whatever. That's all part of this process for you, isn't it?

It is, I think, yes. There's a continuity that is there that seems so much deeper and stronger than anything I've read or heard or seen. You know, not seen; (laughs) but yeah, I'd like to think that I've always been interested in deep, basic things, the nub of things, and I'm not for one minute assuming that I have a better understanding than anybody, but it has been my aim to delve into these things and death I guess is the ultimate. Well, you can't, that's the thing, you cannot think your way into death, which again highlights that notion of being alive without having to think. Not philosophising about life; being alive and aware, but not getting caught up in notions of continuity and age and how much longer you might have to live and notions like that.

END OF INTERVIEW.