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Full transcript of an interview with

GARY IAN DAWE

On 24 June 2008

by Sally Stephenson

for the

MEADOWS 150 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Interview of Mr Gary Ian Dawe conducted by Dr Sally Stephenson on 24th June 2008 at Meadows, South Australia, for the Meadows 150 Oral History Project.

DISK 1 OF 2

I'm Sally Stephenson interviewing Mr Gary Dawe in Meadows on 24th June 2008 for the Meadows Oral History Project. This project is funded by a Positive Ageing Developing Grant from the Department for Families and Communities and grants from the History Trust of South Australia and the District Council of Mount Barker.

Gary, I'd just like to start with some brief biographical questions. Can you tell me your full name, please?

Are you serious? (laughs) Gary Ian Dawe.

And when and where were you born?

I was born on 22nd February 1956 at McLaren Vale Hospital.

What are your parents' names?

Parents' names Mervyn Clifford Dawe and Barbara Elizabeth Dawe.

What was your mum's maiden name?

Mum was Lemar from Macclesfield and Dad was Dawe from Gawler. And there's still a few there.

What work did your parents do?

I guess they've done a bit of everything over the years, like everyone else; but prior to me coming along [they] were at various places down at Victor Harbor – I think that's where Mum and Dad met, down at Victor. Dad was in a dry cleaning store with his uncle and Mum was a cook at – I always get it wrong, but I think it was the Grosvenor Hotel at Victor. Prior to that, I probably can't go back. And then once we come to Meadows Dad worked in the Farmers Union factory and then took on a [milk] can truck and general truck at the same time, so it was can in the morning, did general transport to Adelaide and back in the afternoon; and then in 1966, I reckon, in June, he became the first owner of a bulk milk tanker in the Adelaide Hills, so he

started that and went on until he retired. And as a family business with milk tankers we got out of that in June 1988. And Mum was a lovely, good mum looking after four children. (laughs) Back in those days.

I'll ask you a little bit more about the factory in a moment, but for a while when you were growing up you lived at Greenhills.

Yes.

What do you remember about that?

Greenhills, I can remember a couple of specific things at Greenhills. We were in a lovely old farmhouse that I think belonged to Arthur Smith, I'm pretty sure, and Dad and Mum rented it. I remember as a kid walking over the hills looking for rainbows. I remember the story of a first snake up there. I remember a lizard, and I suppose because I was so small to me it looked like an alligator, it was that big, and that was down by the old barn. I remember lots of good times when we'd walk down to the Thomas farm, which wasn't far away. And I remember my little brother (laughs) was scalded in the bath because I guess back then we only had a copper and Mum had to transport the hot water from the copper, which I reckon was out the back, to the bathroom, so he unfortunately got scalded and I don't know whether it was Mum or Dad – I could be wrong (laughs) there, so I've got to be careful. Yes, I remember, I guess, great times. I think we were up there until I was about six, I'm pretty sure, give or take.

What was the story about the snake?

The snake: I believe Dad was under the car, servicing the car, like it was an old Holden, like an FJ – I'm not sure if it was, but it was like an FJ Holden – under the car and a snake went crawling past him while he was under there. So that's all I can remember, and him saying about it – – –.

So you've mentioned that your father worked at the factory and he had the milk truck. Where did he use to collect the milk from?

He used to go with the can trucks, he had the kind of Prospect Hill, Blackfellows Creek run right out to Mount Magnificent, I remember we used to go out to Stones

out at Mount Magnificent, I think we'd end up out there; but I'm pretty sure mainly Prospect Hill, that road through Blackfellows Creek up Mount Magnificent.

And then did he take them – that was the Farmers Union factory?

Yes. And then he'd take it back into the factory at Meadows, Farmers Union factory, and yes, empty the cans out and then he'd then do general to Adelaide, either the factory would get him to either cart gear down or I know definitely brought merchandise and that back from Adelaide. Used to go out there, and we'd go out to Adelaide Brighton [Cement] at Port Adelaide and pick up cement bags, we'd go out to somewhere around near the wool stores there and pick up grain so that they'd bring that all back to the Meadows factory and then the factory'd sell it to farmers and other, general public.

I know as a child you used to play around the factory sometimes.

Yes. (laughs) Yes. I've got to be careful who knows. Yes, we used to, I suppose, break in to the factory – I don't think it was ever locked too well – and sneak around the factory and it was quite fascinating in the cheese room in the middle there, where it's the bar room now, and also under the office or just under the office there there was the old wet cellar, which I'm pretty sure they used in the early days, with the little slate wall, and we used to sit in there and hide and I'd reckon there might have been an odd cigarette smoked down there with a few of the boys over the years – not that I smoked, really.

There were also showers at the back of the factory.

Yes, there was a shower block there, and it's probably about exactly where the kindergarten is now. Wouldn't be far off. And, as mentioned before, you never had hot water at home for baths or showers; probably didn't have showers, I wouldn't have thought; so we used to come in every so often with Dad and the boys and go into the shower block, and a lot of other fathers did the same, brought their kids in to shower, and I can always remember that.

I'd like to ask you now about schooling. Where did you go to primary school?

I went to the Meadows Primary School, yes, for the whole entirety, from grade one to grade seven. Yes, I can remember – had lots of good times, I suppose. I don't know whether I enjoyed it at the time but I enjoy the memories now from times where they were under the big pine trees that used to run along the western boundary, I suppose, of the school, playing marbles; the old woodwork centre, that's gone now; I suppose the sport, your cricket and football on the oval, local oval. I remember assemblies: we used to all have to stand in line, I'm pretty sure every Monday morning, in order of rank and file – in other words, from grade one to grade seven – and I think it was a great thrill to get to grade seven because you could stand in the back line, so that was quite fun. And we used to always have a bottle of milk, I reckon we were given each day, and sometimes it wasn't too flash because it had been out in the sun on a summer's morning, but we used to always have the tops, they'd flick all round the school, so it was just good fun. Yes, lots of good times went through there.

How did you used to get to school?

Well, because we moved down to Meadows when I was about six, around that mark, to the end of Brooks Street. We used to either walk up through the factory, up the main street, or across the paddock and across the oval. So, yes, didn't have to go far so it was good.

What was the paddock like that you were walking through?

The paddock now, which has actually the tennis courts in it, was a farming paddock. Sometimes it had cattle in there grazing, then they'd lock it up for hay so sometimes you'd walk through there when it was three or four foot high and I suppose take the circumstances – although it's funny, now I wouldn't walk through long grass if you paid me, but back then it didn't seem to worry us, we just used to wander through.

Now, I know your route, you said, also went through the driveway of the factory.

Yes.

So on the way home, you collected something.

Basically, because Dad – and I suppose all the employees, I'm not sure if it was one of their perks of working in the factory, they all had milk and I'm not sure whether

they paid for it, I don't think – so we used to always have to leave a billy out on the little stand where they emptied the cans and then on our way home if it was still there the first of who was coming home would pick up the milk and take home. That was how we had our milk delivered in those days.

What about, coming back to the school, where did you used to sit and have your lunch?

Lunch was in the old what we called the 'shelter shed'. I'm not whether it's still there, probably not. Shelter shed, so we were given, (laughs) I'm not sure, fifteen, twenty minutes, where we had to sit in the shelter shed and eat – whether you ate or not you had to sit in the shelter shed – before we went out and played for the rest of the lunchtime.

Did you use to bring your lunch?

Yes. Mum always cut our lunch. On a Wednesday, though – I know later on, but on a Wednesday we definitely were allowed to buy our lunch and were given something like twenty cents to get a pasty and a vanilla slice, and that was our big day out. You'd look forward to Wednesdays because you'd buy your lunch.

Where did that come from, the pasty?

Pretty sure across at the old top shop. We had the top shop and middle shop going, so I'm not sure whether it was all from the same one each time, but yes, either the top shop or the middle shop.

One of your teachers, you told me before, was sports mad. Can you tell me about him?

Oh, yes. Mr Twartz, our headmaster there, he was definitely sport mad. Myself being a passionate – well, I just love sport, football and cricket, and Mr Twartz was a mad North Adelaide barracker, he used to go every Saturday to watch North Adelaide, and on a Monday morning – I don't know whether I was teacher's pet or what – but I'd get a copy of the *Budget*, the SANFL¹ *Budget*, and because I followed Norwood I'd be able to read all about Norwood and it was fantastic.

¹ SANFL – South Australian National Football League.

You mentioned playing marbles, but what other games did you use to play at school?

Well, we were allowed to play the girls (laughs) in netball, until we beat them. (laughs) And we were a bit rough. Football and cricket out on the oval. I'm not sure if I should tell the story, (laughs) but I will: I think that's one day Mr Twartz did tell us off, Kim Wilson and myself, about I think for not the lunch hour but for about lunch hours, two recess times, two afternoon recess times and wouldn't let anyone else have a bat because they couldn't get us out, but we were banned for about a week after that, and (laughs) yes, always remember that, but probably taught me that you've got to share, which we found out later on in junior sport: give everyone a go.

After you left Meadows Primary School, which school did you go to?

I went to Mount Barker High School for four years, so did my Leaving. Saw the change of the new Mount Barker School over there, saw the man land on the moon in first year, fairly significant. There was an old classroom that could be opened up into about four rooms all in one, and we all sat in there and watched this TV – I don't think we could even see it because it was about that far in the stage – but we saw the man land on the moon, so I always remember that. And then towards the end, in our last year in Leaving, we spent it in the new school, which part of it's still there, Mount Barker High.

I'll just ask you now about some of your informal pastimes other than sport, and you've mentioned to me in the preliminary interview that you used to catch yabbies in the dam.

Okay, yes, that's correct. There was an old dam in the paddock we used to walk through to get to the oval to get to the school, where the tennis courts are now, there was an old dam there and we used to catch yabbies in it and take them home to Mum – probably at weekends, I'm pretty sure, was the main times we did that because otherwise we'd be at school – yes, take them home to Mum, Mum would boil them up, we'd then wrap them in some newspaper and then take them down opposite where Will's Garage is now, under the big pine trees – I think it was Winstanley's Garage back then – and we'd sell them for five or ten cents, something like that, to passing cars (laughs) and then we'd go and buy some lollies from the bottom fish

shop. So we weren't trying to do opposition to the fish shop, but yes, that was good fun.

So what other pastimes were there, other than sport?

Well, sport probably was the main bit. But other pastimes, as I say, used to spend a lot of time out at the dairy farm at Thomases, that was about three kilometres out, spent a lot of time out there and you'd do things from grubbing thistles to helping feed out, to shifting pipes, to fishing in the dam there, to mushrooming. That was a big part of my life, out at the Thomas farm there.

Scouts, I was a Cub and Scout, so that kept me out of trouble for a while, which I enjoyed, the camping. Am I starting to sweat?

No.

Sorry.

What happened when you had your camp at Blackfellows Creek?

(laughs) There was only three of us, for some reason. I'm trying to think what we were: Kookaburra Patrol. And there was only three of the six of us that went and on a Saturday night we camped on a bend between two creeks down at Blackfellows Creek there, and Dean Michelmore, who was our Scoutmaster, and lovely tent, good afternoon, and then we'd gone to bed, and we heard noises out there and next thing our tent fell down on top of us. We absolutely were petrified, scared, didn't know what to do. We just virtually grabbed a couple of things and then walked into Dean Michelmore's farmhouse where Betty-Ann was there and looked after us and rang the parents. (laughs) I remember we might have taken a couple of things each and I took the football with me. I think everyone laughed about that, I'd take that; I didn't worry about anything else. Yes, that was good.

Another popular place locally seems to have been the quarry. What sorts of things did you do there?

Quarry? I remember in the early days the quarry ---. (break in recording)

Gary, you were talking about the quarry and the sorts of things you did there.

The quarry, the old quarry up the top – I call it ‘up the top’, anyway. I suppose in the early days as a kid we’d go up there rabbiting, but we didn’t do very good; but later on in life it was kind of a meeting place for the young lads, somewhere we could go. You’d be able to get a couple of cars in there and we’d have bonfires and just sit around there, and probably have a couple of drinks as well at the same time. But I haven’t been there for years, I don’t think you can even drive in there, but you’d definitely drive in there and it was a place where we could go and I suppose not cause anyone too much trouble and just have a bit of fun.

I’d like to ask you now about all the sport that you’ve been involved in. What sports have you played for Meadows?

I guess, in the majority, football and cricket. I did have one game of tennis (laughs) before I started my cricket career as a child. But other than that, yes, I suppose living next to an oval I was orientated to football and cricket and I suppose, yes, played right from the time I can remember to, well, in football into my mid-thirties and in cricket into my mid-forties and even a bit later with one game I played with my nephew (laughs) when I was about forty-eight, but the body didn’t help me there.

You told me before about Don Collins, who was one of the cricket coaches. What was he like?

Don was a magnificent man and coached us as kids. He was a painter around town. He sometimes didn’t get to the practice that often and you’d have guys like Len Brooks and Clive Brooks² take us, who were good A-grade cricketers then. But Don would always take us on the Saturdays. And he had a white Holden ute and (laughs) back in those days if you got one other parent to go with him you were very lucky, so sometimes I think we nearly had the whole team in the back of the ute or in the front. There was a pecking order with Don: once you got to captain and vice-captain you were allowed to sit in the front and you discussed tactics on the way over and the way back. But Don was one of the fairest sports people around. He did coach football as well, until he had – I’m pretty sure he had polio and it slowed him down a bit, but he continued looking after us kids. Great legacy he left of sportsmanship, he left it with the Hills Cricket Association because he’d become a life member of that. But yes,

² See OH 829/19

he's affected, I'd say, or influenced a lot of young sports people in Meadows to be fair sports people.

What was the socialising after the cricket and football matches, what was that like?

As we got older, I guess one of my greatest philosophies in life is that playing sport to meet people, have a good hit-out with the opposition but then to catch up with them after, and I suppose in that sense I played pretty hard at times off the field (laughs) as well as on the field; but over the years met many, many and many great people and sports people and to this day that wherever you go kind of in the state you can see someone that you've known through playing football or cricket and it's a great legacy of sport is friendship. So yes, that's the biggest thing I've pushed. I've coached a few kids in A grade and that over the years, and I still maintain that you have a good old go with the opposition, you want to win, but end of the day you learn how to lose as well and respect your opposition. So that's fantastic. I don't know whether I should go too much into what we used to do after. (laughs) We used to play up fairly well and have some great friends with the opposition.

Was that socialising sort of in the local pub, or -- --?

Well, back before we had the sports clubs and all the other towns had sports clubs it was basically, yes, ninety per cent of the time you'd go back to the local hotel, wherever you played – I mean, if you played at Echunga you'd go back to the Echunga Hotel, at Meadows of course Meadows – and have a pretty good time.

What happens now?

What happens now? I'm too old. (laughter)

Do the teams go back to the hotel?

Basically, now, a few things come into play. Sports clubs have come into play now at the actual oval, licensed clubs. Now, the Meadows Sports and Rec[reation Club] was opened in September 1982 so I guess for the last twenty-five, –six years the Meadows crew have always gone back to the club or walked up the stairs to the club. It has changed, I guess, the dynamics of it a bit but it's helped fund a lot of our facilities and a lot of other towns have done the same, of course, now. But I think

there's probably, since the drink-driving has come in, there's probably been a little bit people on the err of caution, which they should be, so there's perhaps not the total involvement like there used to be. People have got responsibilities now. But yes, everyone's back at the club, I suppose we say these days.

So does that mean that there's less socialising between the different teams?

Yes, there is, I feel, Sally, that there's less socialising now, which I find a little bit disappointing. But, end of the day, it's life, I suppose, the way it's all panned out.

Now, we if we change to talk about the football club for a while: I know the football club was struggling a bit in the mid-1970s, I believe.

Yes.

What was happening then?

I suppose like all clubs you have your ups and downs, but we were in the early '70s really struggling for players and numbers, and there was mooted that we should probably – we hadn't been successful for a while, few years in the early '70s, and perhaps it's time we looked at amalgamating. So there was a big push to amalgamate with Kangarilla, our neighbours down the road. It kind of took off to extent that perhaps yes, we could be strong and win; but there was also the argument that we may lose our identity, because it seems to be the way with amalgamations that eventually you lose your identity. Probably at the start of 1977 season, end of the '76 season – we used to have our annual general meetings at the kind of start of the year, not like now we have it at the end of the previous year, but it was at the start of '77 – and it was on that we were going to go to that AGM³ and vote and combine with Kangarilla. That was kind of the push.

Whether in my wisdom I'm not sure, and thanks to a mate, I think we helped to keep the Meadows Football Club going. Phil Thomas and myself used to go down on Fridays and keep ourselves fit at Cross Road Bowls – a strenuous session of an hour and a half, weights and all this, and make macho men out of us – but then we kind of called into a hotel on the way home because we were feeling that good. Whatever it was, I got enough courage to go back to the AGM or walk into the AGM and tell

³ AGM – Annual General Meeting.

everyone that we should not be amalgamating, combining with Kangarilla; that the Meadows Football Club was bigger and that the passion should be there for us to go on. And whatever I said I kind of influenced a few people, and I suppose the rest is history, that we're still going some thirty-odd years later and been quite successful in the last ten years especially, but yes, we've had lots of premierships over those thirty years. So I guess, yes, (laughs) every now and then you look back and say, 'I'm glad I went down' – I know I shouldn't say 'I'm glad I had a couple of beers' – but perhaps I did this time, perhaps it was good. (laughs)

I think one thing that seems to have helped the club in recent years has been having the Panther League. Can you explain to me what the Panther League is?

Panther League is a primary school-run competition. It's actually run throughout South Australia, and each primary school area has a structure in place to encourage the schoolkids to play school football on a Saturday rather than not play because there's no opportunity or because club football starts at twelve, about when kids were getting out of primary school. It's been going for a long time – in I'm pretty sure the early '80s we started being involved with Panther League. Panther League is the South Adelaide side of it, so all the league clubs had their little areas, and we through Paul Thomas and I reckon Paul Wray, the first links down to Southern, and that was in the early '80s; ended up still going strong now.

I guess the thing we found is that the school at the time – and I'm pretty sure Tom Bowden was headmaster – he was a pretty football fanatic but he didn't want to really get the school to look after it and he thought the best thing was the Meadows Football Club should look after it. And, that being the case, the football club did put their hand up to do it, in conjunction with the primary school because it had to be under the primary school banner otherwise they wouldn't allow it to happen. So there's been a bit of a quiet understanding that the football club's had a fair involvement over the years in running the Panther League. Lots of parents over the years. It's one of the most well-structured competitions around, with the umpiring, your supporting in the medicine side, you know, ambulances there all the time on-site; and it's a competition that I suppose fostered children to play football, to learn football, in a semi-competitive way, because scores weren't kept but every kid on that ground knew who

had won (laughs) and I suppose as a parent we've all seen, in my group, those involved, and even now when you go there you still see in the early part with the year two-threes, you see a couple of them sitting down playing sandcastles and they're having a ball, and that's been ongoing since I've known. So it's a really great concept and a bit of a secret of Meadows because the clubs we play against haven't had that fortune of being involved, so I think that's why we've been lucky to have so many good juniors over the years.

What's the most important thing about sport?

Most important thing about sport to me is – there's a few things, so I'll be a politician. It's learning to compete against other people and learning how to win and how to lose and how to make good friends, and I think you put them all together and that's what it's all about. And, as I said, I've been lucky enough to have a couple of mentors that taught me the passion of sport, and I've mentioned Don Collins with cricket, but also had Kev Thomas with football, that put the passion of playing sport in there and the passion of Meadows in there. So I think overruling is just being out there, competing with mates that are on the same side of you – sorry, [not] competing, *playing* with mates, and then competing with opposition; but in the end you're all friends at the end of the day. So great friendship I'd say [is] the best.

How important are the sports clubs in a town like Meadows?

Yes, a critical part of country towns. I've kind of only spoke about cricket and football, but the tennis and netball club, a significant part. The four clubs are a significant part of the town, and that was one of the good parts about the Sports and Rec Club being formed back in 1980-81, which was a result of the rec grounds at the time suggesting that it's time a new change rooms were being built, and at the time it was the idea that all four clubs get together and help build a change room and clubrooms, which was a great effort by the whole town.

But to answer the question, Sally, I think in any country town you need to have those sports clubs. I'd hate to think what you'd do without sport. From the young girls playing netball and tennis to the young fellas playing footy and cricket. So, yes, I couldn't see country towns without sport. (break in recording)

I just wanted to know, Gary, what's it like in a town when you win the football or cricket premierships?

It's probably a place you want to leave for twenty-four hours (laughs) or forty-eight hours, Sally. (laughs) I was lucky enough to play in one senior A-grade cricket and one senior A-grade football [premiership team]. I was too young when the cricket won, but the football one, we hadn't won for seventeen years in '84 and it was that memorable that we had the policeman from Echunga come over to kind of tell us boys to just quieten down for the night because we were about to paint the town white with the normal premierships – "we won, Premiers 1984" on the road, and you wouldn't believe it: first time you try and do something that's wrong, and the policeman's right alongside of you. So we got caught. We actually didn't get past base one. For some reason, Mr Eades, the still policeman there, he'd come over, he'd heard there was things happening, and he nipped us in the bud. I think the can of paint's still out in Eckerman's paddock where we threw it because we were that frightened when he came driving up with his siren on.

But yes. I guess the celebrations don't contribute to the joy of actually winning it with a group of mates that you've spent the whole year aiming for that premierships. The celebration's just an add-on bonus; and I think nowadays, because we've had a fair bit of success, like four in a row, I think we're perhaps over celebrating sometimes with the boys. But they're all good kids, but you can get carried away. (laughs)

Now, you mentioned earlier that the Meadows Oval has been virtually your backyard ever since you were about six and so you've been involved in maintaining it, I know, for at least thirty-six years. So can you tell me about how you got to be involved in watering the oval and mowing it?

Watering? Probably when I was around sixteen, seventeen, I'm not sure whether I actually went on the Recreation Grounds Committee or in talking to someone like Ross Buckley⁴, who was on the Rec Grounds, whether I wanted to help out, which I thought, 'Boy, to be able to be involved in an oval', when you used to be able to

⁴ See OH 829/7

watch TV and watch the Adelaide Ovals and the MCGs⁵ and you're thinking, 'I can actually be part of my own little oval', so I took it as a huge opportunity to help out, and always have, to the extent – yes, I guess I started when I could just carry the bucket, because we had – – –. I can't remember the actual pipes. We had pipes above the ground, the old irrigation pipes; but I first got involved when we put in underground pipes with bayonets and you'd put in the sprinklers, you'd screw them down, and they were all in a bucket. I think there was about sixteen we used to put out. There was about forty-eight points on the oval and used to do it in thirds. So they weren't big sprinklers with the size of what they'd put out. So there's about sixteen of these big, brass sprinklers in a drum and I reckon I started when I was only about sixteen, I was a bit small then, and I could just lift it. (laughs) I guess it got to the stage then when I was lucky enough, because I was looking after the oval, I drove my car on there – which I won't allow anyone else to do (laughs) – and used to drive alongside and time it just right and open the door and put them in. I got a big lazy. Yes, it's been part of my life. As you say, I was next door to it; you can't get much closer.

There's a lot of changes. The old sprinkler lines were pulled up and a new, pop-up sprinkler system was put in in I guess the late '70s, early '80s and they were a big [innovation] to what had happened, automation whatever, with a box where you could set it and know there was half a dozen coming up at a time, and so that came on board. But the only thing, they were big American Weather Techs, they were called, they were the bell shape and they used to fill up with sand and you'd no end of trouble trying to keep the sprinklers free of sand so that they'd go round. So they weren't that flash. But then, as we went on, we I guess improved it all the way, all along, and to the stage where I guess we've got as good a sprinkler system as any town would want, including doing the little bottom oval as well, so that's all happened.

We've put drainage in the oval because back in the dim, dark ages you couldn't – when you were playing football in the real, good old winters, when we used to have good winters – you couldn't get your feet out (laughs) of the mud, and to kick twenty

⁵ MCG – Melbourne Cricket Ground.

or thirty metres was a big kick, in the mud. And again, as a community, since the clubroom's been there, we've [been] continually upgrading and as a result put drainage in which has made the oval fantastic in winter. So yes, all good.

You've also mowed the grass, I think, until fairly recently. How did you use to do that?

Back when I first started I used to be on a roster system with four of the local farmers. I can remember that quite specifically. We had Kev Thomas out on the Kondoparinga Road, we had the Buckley family up on Pearson Road, we had Len Brooks out there at halfway to Kangarilla, and Alan Dayman who was up where Nu-Earth are now on the Nottage Road. And so we'd have a roster system. Because of the job I was in with the milk tankers at the time I'd have Fridays off and so I would arrange whose turn it was, go out and pick the tractors up and then drive them in, hook up the mower, do the oval and then take it back. It was quite good. It was, I suppose, interesting that ---.

(laughs) The character of the farmers is what makes a country town because I'd want to get things happening and moving quick and you'd get out to the farmers and time didn't mean too much, and to the extent of Len [Brooks] sometimes – was always milking when I'd go and pick it up, but one thing with Len, he'd always have plenty of time to stop milking, come and help me fill up the tractor and get me on my way. I've all these good memories.

That was in the pre-drainage days, so did you ever get bogged in the tractor?

I did, I got bogged. And one other thing I did which I shouldn't have, and that was when I perhaps did hurry a couple of times and leave farmers' places without filling up. I'd run out of diesel, and to get a diesel going is not the easiest. You don't just put diesel in the tank; you have to bleed it, and every tractor's different. And so, being a non-mechanic (laughs) like myself I had a few issues there and had embarrassingly have to try and either go home and get someone to go out and get the farmer to come in and show me, or go down to Will's Garage, annoy Bob [Will] to say, 'Come up the oval and prime this tractor for me because I've run out'. So I think, yes, that happened to me a couple of times and it shouldn't have. I didn't learn.

But as far as getting bogged, because we cut in the summer, probably didn't. I got bogged once there on the bottom side and that was again my fault: I was told not to go there but I thought I'd be all right. So yes, and had to get, I reckon at the time Clive [Brooks], to come and help me on that one. Interesting. (laughs)

You've mentioned the Sport and Recreation Social Club and that it was instrumental and getting the new clubrooms. How does that committee actually differ from the Recreation Ground Committee?

(laughs) Yes, it's a good question, because I think everyone that's come into Meadows since the clubrooms has been there in '82 has asked, 'What's the Meadows Sports and Rec Club and what's the Recreation Grounds, what's the difference, who does what?' The Recreation Grounds is arranged under the Council constitution, I suppose, that they have ratepayers' bodies in each town that has the right to help look after their recreation grounds, and so there's always been a Meadows Recreation Ground and their agenda is that it's a ratepayer group that gets a budget from the Council to help run that recreation ground. So that's specifically on the grounds, I guess you'd say, whether it be the courts, the oval, the lights; but not so much on the building.

And that's when the Sports and Rec came into play when it was formed in '81 and then the clubroom was opened in '82, September '82. That was a combination of the four clubs trying to get a home together, change rooms together, from our older better block ones. So the Recreation [Ground Committee] is purely the oval-based or the grounds-based; the Sports and Rec's agenda is quite specific, that it's there to promote and develop junior sport in the town and on behalf of the four clubs, so it's quite specific that it's for the four clubs – tennis, football, netball and cricket – and its main aim, objective, to promote junior sport in the town.

Who's on the Recreation Ground Committee?

At the moment?

Yes, or how's that arranged?

Well, it is a mixture of football, cricket, tennis, netball again, because they use the oval so the Recreation Grounds have actually asked all the clubs to put representatives in. So there's currently two from each club. Bowling Club used to be

in it but they've wandered off nowadays, they've got their own agenda up next to the oval, but I think they're still involved slightly. And basically it's ratepayers that wish to be on there to help. But when you look at it that way you'd say it's nearly the same as Sports and Rec, (laughs) so why we have two I don't know. I think it's politics. I think under the constitution it's Section 66(c) of the Council whatever the constitution is that it's got to have the ability for ratepayers, it can't have an incorporated body like the Sports and Rec run it, so I think that's the issue. But we double up a lot and confuse a lot of people, too.

You had a special name on the Rec Ground Committee, I think, didn't you?

(laughs) Yes. Because I wear a few caps, I've always said to Clive [Brooks], who's been President for many years, that I'm the Sprinkler Party. I'm not football, I'm not cricket, I'm the Sprinkler Party because my main worry is having that oval looking pretty right. So yes, Sprinkler Party.

Well, there's a link, too, I think, with the Sport and Recreation Social Club and the Country Fair. Can you explain to me what that is?

Yes, certainly. I guess as mentioned earlier the clubrooms were officially opened in September '82, so the committee of the Sports and Rec in around September '83 thought it was time to have an anniversary. One year old fundraiser, like we do. And it was going to be this big country fair, and that's what we called it, was just a country fair. We actually had five hundred people come to it and we were really rapt: anniversary, you know, so it was a brilliant anniversary. We had a Junior Dairymaid and that was about it, so that was '83. My memory's fading: we may have had a cow there that was hand-milked with Brian Maywald and Mrs Rankine from Strathalbyn.

'84 came along, we thought, 'Well, this is good, and we got five hundred'. In '84 we thought, 'We'll go a bit bigger and have a Meadows Country Fair and set it as a normal annual event'. And we were kind of fortunate – unfortunate for the guy, but fortunate for the Country Fair – a young footballer named Dave Thomas back then did his knee in, total knee reconstruction, so he had his leg plastered from top to bottom, and he took it on board and got pretty passionate about it and kind of set up what we see now. It's changed. But he started getting the media involved, he went to one of the radio stations down there, got them very involved; he got the enthusiasm of

the committee to see that it could grow; and in '84 we had quite a significant Meadows Country Fair – in fact, it was the Farmers Union Meadows Country Fair because that was where we started getting some funding from and that's remained since this day, the Farmers Union Meadows Country Fair. They've put in thousands of dollars, hundreds of thousands of dollars for that fair over the twenty-odd years, twenty-five years. But Dave helped structure this fair that we see now and we had a lot of media.

We started this hand-milking competition, which back then you had to bring your own cow and milk it. But not everyone had a cow, so there was only three or four used to bring it. We then, because we could see the potential of the country fair, the way it could go, and I guess the fascination of Adelaide people, city people, coming up and getting a real kick out of seeing an actual cow pretty close up and being hand-milked, we could see that this could be something. So it developed from there.

We then had a very enthusiastic and productive committee. We have had some very good chairpersons in there, highly-motivated, with some business sense in it that's helped structure it. I think there was Chris Thomas, myself, Tony Clipstone and Bob Myers, about '85, '86, looked out the window and said that we're going to set this up so it runs for the rest of its time in a structure that everyone could get and help with for it to be a state icon. Don't know whether we got there; I think we've got pretty close, and there's been lots of people since who have helped and followed through to the extent that we pushed it as the only hand-milking competition in South Australia, which it was at the time. We then set up a Celebrity Udder Tug as well, which I believe the Royal [Adelaide] Show pinched off us a few years ago, but they can have it. We're happy. (laughs)

And I guess overall, again, it did a few things, Sally, the Country Fair. It joined the community together. I think in those early days we used to have about two hundred people in the community actually all volunteering for the day, because as you realise it's a big day and there's so many stalls and so many jobs. So when we used to count up together with the CFS⁶ on the gate and the people who were organising all the events – whether it be the parade, right through the day, to everyone on the food stalls

⁶ CFS – Country Fire Service.

– we were getting up to about two hundred because they'd do shifts and that, so two hundred throughout the day. And no-one seemed to grizzle; where everything else you'd ask for help throughout the year there'd be 'No, thanks', or whatever, but Country Fair, everyone seemed to get together. It's Meadows's one big day. And you find out later that there used to be a Meadows Show, you know, many years ago, so whether it's just we've done a big circle and it's turned around and this is the Meadows Show but we call it the 'Meadows Country Fair', I'm not sure.

It's been fantastic for the town on the money it's put into that seven acres. Again, a mixture of the buildings and the actual grounds. All the funding's gone back into that, and that's helped fund everything. I mean we've kind of self-funded. I think the Council would love us, the Meadows district, because we seem to fund ourselves. Yes, so the Country Fair. I mean, God, there's – like my eldest, Chad, born in '81, so other than a couple of years he wouldn't know Meadows without a Country Fair and there's a lot born that wouldn't know Meadows without a Country Fair. It's just been a great part of Meadows, I'd say.

Well, apart from the sporting committees you were also on the Hall Committee –

(laughs) Yes.

– with your older brother. How did you become involved in that, can you remember?

(laughs) I really – my memory's fading. I would think it's because we lived right behind the Hall, behind the factory. In those days we were both young kids or teenagers growing up, no hall in Meadows, we didn't have a hall in Meadows for many years, so to socialise you used to have to go outside the district. So I think there was again an opportunity to help do something there and see the opportunity that we could have a hall back. So I'm not sure there's anything else.

So whose idea was it to convert the [Farmers' Union] factory to a hall?

I know people like Ken Secker and Bob Harper and Ray Golder – look, there's lots on that original committee. Pat Rowe, John Buckley. But I reckon old Ken – I shouldn't call him 'old'; (laughs) he was old to me then – Ken Secker, I reckon he had a fair bit of push behind it. Again, it was a bit of a mission for the town. You

know, you can turn a cheese factory into a hall: probably some people said it couldn't be done. So I guess sometimes that helps people's drive when they say, 'Well, we'll prove that we can do it'. But no, I'm not real specific there, Sally.

How did the committee raise money, though? Do you remember ---?

Oh, fundraising events. But I know they used to put potatoes in, spuds, and grow them and harvest them and sell spuds to – I suppose it's funny how where they used to do that is where I live now, so I know all that which was part of Lindsay Gibson's mother's or family's land, that was all done in spuds and they used to get water from the oval bore, I reckon. So yes, it's funny how it's on where I sit now, (laughs) the spuds.

What was the opening night of the Hall like?

Opening night was huge, yes. In fact, you couldn't move. And I don't think we've ever seen anything like that many in the Hall and don't think we ever will again. So, yes, I just remember it was just people everywhere and just a good night. Good night. (laughs)

And you also had a story about the old Hall - so there was an old Hall in Meadows where the playground was, many years before - what happened when that was being pulled down?

(laughs) One of my schoolmates at the time, one of the Golder boys, Chris, he was helping his family – I think Ray, who was a farmer in Meadows, Ray Golder, and his family – they either volunteered to pull it down or were commissioned with the job of pulling it down and helping because Ray was on the old Hall Committee and helped raise a lot of funds for the new one. But I remember we were playing football, it was on a Saturday, and the A grade were about to run out and next thing all we could see is Chris sliding down the side of the roof of the old Hall where we drive in now, and it was funny. It wasn't funny for Chris at the time; he was just – whether he was on the end of a sheet that he was pulling off the roof, but it just – yes, was just so funny at the time, to see Chris sliding down. (laughs)

One of the jobs that you had after you left school is helping drive the milk tanker, wasn't it? What was that work like?

Just for family business, and Meadows being a dairying area I suppose it was all part of — — —. It was something I thought I'd never do, drive a truck, but it was just part of a family culture in the end. The business ran seven days a week, not that we'd work seven days a week, we obviously rotated; but it I suppose taught me a few things. It taught me that I had to work, work hard and work seven days, weekends, nights. Yes, it gave me a good work ethic. And also I guess a strong background in the whole dynamics of the state because we used to drive from the Barossa, the Adelaide Hills, down the South Coast, down the Langhorne's Creek area, and you'd just see what South Australia is: diverse. Yes, it was interesting, it was interesting. A lot of farmers had more than just a dairy farm.

We might just need to stop and go and change the tapes.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2 OF 2

—You were telling me about where you used to collect the milk in the milk tanker.

Yes, and say statewide, gave a good overview of the diversity of the state. The interesting [thing], you'd go to the Barossa and pick milk up and it was different to where you were at Meadows. At Meadows they were dedicated dairy farmers on eighty acres, most of them only on eighty acres; up in the Barossa they had vineyards and a little dairy, and similar down Langhorne's Creek area, so I guess they needed both to be viable.

Seen some huge changes, I suppose. Meadows now I think maybe five dairy farms left, five or six. There might have been if I said a hundred to a hundred and fifty back when we were picking them up in the Meadows area. So it's just changed hugely in that time.

Yes, I suppose it was thirteen years of my life driving a truck. Taught me to get out of bed on a Sunday morning rather than sleep in, (laughs) although I didn't have to. Mum or Kate⁷ got me out of bed all the time. Yes, but it taught discipline. Yes, definitely.

Did you actually get to meet the farmers?

⁷ Kate Dawe, Gary's wife

Yes, yes. Especially early part of the day or the end, of course, when milking. When we had our night runs and that you wouldn't see too many.

Drove through the Ash Wednesday bushfire. It was still vivid as ever remember. We weren't allowed to – I was down at Mile End at the factory and we weren't allowed back up the hill. Had phone calls, of course, make sure everything's happening okay. So I don't know what happened to Meadows that day because I wasn't allowed at home, but my wife Kate said that everyone had to go up the oval and again – it might be just going off-track a little bit – it's interesting the club had just been opened and that was the central control spot for the town. I mean that's where everyone went to. But yes, we weren't allowed back in the town so I went down and started the night run, so I'd already done the day shift, and started the night run and worked backwards, so started down Goolwa, down the South Coast; and they let us back in from Willunga Hill, back late that night, and all I could see, just it was like driving through a ghost town with just black sticks and red coals and still some burnings. And we went to the dairy farms in the normal sense of who we were meant to be picking up that night and of course there was no milk. No-one had milked until we got back the other side of Meadows again. So it was a sad night, but yes, drove a milk tanker through the middle of it – I suppose after it had gone past. So still vividly remember just the black sticks and red coals everywhere.

Well, a few years ago now you changed to real estate. What changes have there been that you've seen just in the land use in the region?

Oh, the land use now, Sally, I suppose is just really lifestyle, lifestyle properties and horses. The dairies have gone, a lot of farms over the years have taken the opportunity to be able to sell off some of their assets, be it time that they were getting out of farming because it wasn't viable, so there's lots of little lifestyle blocks of all different sizes all throughout the Adelaide Hills, and I guess because now it's so close to Adelaide because the tunnel⁸, even though you mightn't save a lot of time, it's just a nice drive now. It's not stressful to drive to Adelaide now through the new freeway and the tunnel, so it's really opened up the Adelaide Hills and Meadows. So yes, my main things that I sell, are lifestyle. The towns haven't grown yet. They may, as we

⁸ Heysen Tunnels on the South-Eastern Freeway

know. And the prices, prices have doubled – I've been in real estate eight years, they've more than doubled in that time.

Is there something that characterises the people buying those properties, do you think?

I think there's a perception to come out into the Hills from the city. I think there's always that fascination, that people want to try it. Some people, they'll never move back, and others after two or three years will say, 'It just wasn't what we thought'. But I think there's that perception of being on your own little farm, be it one acre or twenty acres or fifty acres. That's the type of sizes that floats around here. So I think it's that dream of having your own little farm – yet it's not viable. None of those hobby farms, lifestyle farms, are viable and you've got to have two, both incomes coming in to even probably pay for them. So it's interesting.

Well, you've just alluded to it, really, but the population of Meadows is predicted to double in the next decade, but similar statements have been made for about sixty years. How do you hope that the proposed new development happens, assuming it does happen?

Yes, I guess that's the word, 'presuming'. I'd like it to happen in a controlled way, Sally, something that's not going to change the character of the town overnight. It's been here a long time, a hundred and fifty years, so my thoughts'd be – and it's going to be hard because obviously the costs of the infrastructure are so much for any new developments to happen, whoever the developers are or will be, will need return reasonably quick. So the fear I have, if they need return reasonably quick, is that perhaps it won't be done the way that's in the best interest of Meadows.

Having said that, if they can control it and release bits of land at a time and then the township can grow with that growth, together with new businesses that I think we do need in the town or back in the town, that will be a bonus. I mean, I look at it now and I think that we've gone backwards in the sense of a little community that used to have its own doctor's surgery, used to have a chemist, greengrocers, three shops, probably missing a few things – bank, but I know we won't get the bank back: we had all those services for us; I'd like to think that we can get some of those back and that we've got a nice, reasonably-sized town. Yes. Because I think, if you put it all relative, perhaps a town the size of Meadows fifty years ago that might have had only

two or three hundred people there, in comparison perhaps we do need a thousand, twelve hundred people there now in comparison to make it the same type of town. So that being the case, yes, all for it in the right way, in a controlled way.

There was another development proposed in the early 1970s that you mentioned to me in the preliminary interview. Why didn't that subdivision happen?

I believe so. It was SA Water. They couldn't supply water to Meadows. Again, that was in the part of the Gibson or the Cooks' property where I actually live now. It was over a fair few of those little properties there, might have amounted to ten, fifteen acres of proposed development, and with the aim that they'd be able to get mains water because Mount Bold is only six kilometres away or not far, yet there's no way that the government were ever going to extend it to Meadows, so it was knocked on the head back then.

I'd just like to ask you some general questions now about Meadows. What do you think are the biggest changes in your lifetime?

Biggest changes. It's a good question. I guess everyone's grown up. (laughs) No, well, the biggest changes – and that's where I don't know whether it's a negative or not, because as I mentioned before we had a Council Chambers, we had two cheese factories, we had lots of employment, we had the sawmill, the Wilson's sawmill, we had those half-a-dozen other businesses in the town, banks, so I'd say have we gone backwards in that sense? No, we haven't gone backwards really, but in a community perhaps. So seen the change where, yes, we commute now rather than [work] in Meadows, we commute, and part of that commuting sees that perhaps some of the locals now aren't quite as involved in the community, be it the service clubs or the sports clubs, because they're driving. They're working and driving, and when they're home at Meadows they want to enjoy it, not go and do some work for a service club. So I do see that as a big change, I'd think that's probably the biggest change: we commute to work now, not [work] in Meadows.

How do you think the nearby towns, such as Echunga and Macclesfield or Kangarilla, how have they fared compared with Meadows?

Well, I don't think they ---. Because Meadows was more of a regional centre and everyone seemed to come into Meadows, I don't think they've been as affected

because they didn't have those industries there, or perhaps Macclesfield had a few; but I mean Echunga and Kangarilla didn't have the council or the cheese factories or that, so I don't think they've been as affected. Could be wrong, but yes, I think Meadows more.

Well, what are the best things about living in Meadows, do you think?

I think it's accessible to everything. When I say 'everything', it's accessible to Adelaide, to the southern suburbs, the best beaches in Australia – your Aldingas, your Victor Harbors. You can just do a circle around Meadows and you can touch something. The river, you know, you're not far to the river⁹. So I think it's in the right location. The climate, not very often we have to have the air-conditioner going in summer, you can probably count the real, real hot days – forgetting last year's fourteen-day heatwave, but still was not too bad at Meadows. People used to say the winters were absolutely terrible, awful, used to rain, wet and windy; I think that has changed for the better, living-wise, probably not for the atmosphere or for the farmers. I've just lost my track for a tick. (break in recording) Yes, so winters used to be wet, wet, wet and wet, but that's changed. But I think the climate's good and it's accessible to everything, so yes. It's God's country. (laughs)

What keeps you in the area?

I can't think of a better place to go to. I mean, I've been lucky – well, I haven't been overseas much, but I've been lucky to have been around most of Australia. It's all great while you're on holidays, but I don't think I could live and work at a lot of these places. Meadows will always be home because I just love it.

And have your children stayed in the area?

Kind of. (laughs) They've just left home! Took a while. Chad is in Mount Barker at the moment, Kris at Bridgewater and Julia, my youngest, has just headed off to Warrnambool. But I guess, yes, they love Meadows, too. But it's interesting, though, talking family, that I've got two brothers and one sister and you wouldn't believe where they live: they live in Meadows. (laughs) Still. So we haven't got

⁹ River Murray

away from each other, so that's I guess saying something, that we must have all enjoyed it growing up.

What do you think is important about living in a small town like Meadows?

I think trust, trusting people and the friendship of not having to lock your cars or your house at night. Perhaps that's changing, (laughs) but the overall sense of that trust from people, that you can enjoy their company.

So what things do you think make a good small town?

Good small town?

Yes.

Tradition. Good background. Good families that have grown up over the years and that then filters down to others. Yes, I'd say that was it. There's probably – even though I'm biased and Meadows is probably [one of] hundreds, thousands of other great little country towns around and they've probably all got background of families that have started there and followed through or handed down or handed across the tradition of being here: the dairying, the forest, is that what it is? Is that what kept everyone here? Yes, I'm not quite sure on that one, Sally.

Well, I've asked you now all the questions I was planning on asking. I'll just ask you, though, if you had anything else that you wanted to say before we finish.

No. I guess I would like to [say] thanks for the opportunity. I think, as I mentioned to you one other time, I think if I did it again in ten, twenty years' time, I'd probably have different memories. You know, there's so much that goes on in a lifetime, and I've thought of a couple since I spoke with you earlier and I've run past you today; but there's so many different things that you just keep coming back to, and I might walk out of here in a minute and I'll say, 'God, why didn't I tell Sally that one? It would have been ---.' You know. So, yes, there's always going to be different things. I mean, you know, probably I'm being a bit guarded because I got myself in trouble a couple of times on little things and I don't know whether you want to hear them so I won't tell you. (laughs) No, but overall I just – it's just been a great place to live, to grow up with and all those – as I said, I think that really enforces why it's great is because the people that I've grown up under and respected and be it sport or

other dealings in the community you respect and admire people for what they've done, that's why we've got the CFS and that's why we've got the sports clubs, and that's why back in the days when there was a bank manager you had the trust and good feeling in there, around the town. So I'm quite sure that's why I'm there, because people have made Meadows how it was when I turned up and I've tried to follow through. So that's the main thing.

Well, I'd like to thank you very much for your time today talking to me, I know you're very busy, and also want to thank you for everything you do in the town because you do an enormous amount, and everyone does appreciate that. So thank you very much.

Thanks, Sally. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW