

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

OH 997

Full transcript of an interview with

ALF GARD

conducted 7 and 8 May 2012

by Allison Murchie

Interview duration: five hours, eight minutes

Recording available on CD (6 discs)

Transcribed by Deborah Gard

Note by Alf's daughter, Deborah Gard: Alf died of final stage renal failure 19 February 2013, nine months after this interview was made. His health deteriorated rapidly throughout 2012, taking its toll on the quality of his speaking voice and, at times, the clarity of speech which was once so impeccable. Likewise, his hearing suffered to some degree as is evident occasionally during the interview. However, his clarity of memory and detail remained his well-known friend and comfort to the end of his days.

Access for research: Unrestricted

Right to photocopy: Copies may be made for research and study

Right to quote or publish: Publication only with written permission from the
State Library

This is Allison Murchie interviewing Alf Gard on, I've forgotten the date, the seventh of May 2011 [2012]. The recording is taking place at his daughter's home, Deb Gard, at Glengowrie. So just to get things moving, could you tell me your full name and when and where you were born?

Alfred Harold Brentnall Gard.

And I know you have just had your ninetieth birthday, so what was your date of birth?

It was the fifth of April, nineteen hundred and twenty two, four days overdue!

That's not too bad. Where were you born?

At Dulwich, right near the Victoria Park Racecourse.

So it was going to happen, you were just going to be a racecaller, from where you were born. OK, let's talk about those early days. First, could you just put on the record your mother and father's full name?

My father's was Harold John Gard; my mother's, Annie Vera Thrush.

And did you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, my brother was Owen John Brentnall Gard, and my sister is Jeanette Thrush Brentnall Gard.

And where did you fit into the family structure – who was the oldest?

In the middle - - -.

You were in the middle, OK.

My brother was two years and ten months older than me and my sister is eight years younger, born in 1930.

What I'd like to just talk about for a while is that early family life. Now I know that your parents were very musical and very very talented, so would you like to talk about them for a little while?

Mother and father met at the Elder Conservatorium during World War I. Mother was a top scholar there, she held three scholarships: one for pianoforte, two for singing and Dad held two scholarships for singing – and they met there and started singing duets. They did a lot of work in late 1918 and 1919, and my brother was born in 1919 and they went on – they were rehearsing. I was born in 1922 and Mum and Dad were rehearsing at that time prior to going

to London. I often say I was a baby in my mother's womb hanging over the top of a timpani. My mother was a timpanist in the Adelaide Orchestra – the first in Australia.

So you got your music while you were in the womb?

Yes, a little lump hanging over the front. I remember, vaguely, as a little child, perhaps one year old, the melodies. They sang Puccini and Verdi, and a lot of the lovely old duets – and melody was a thing that I grew up with. I just used to lie there and listen. They could both sing them beautifully. They weren't half singers, they were the celebrated Australian duettists. They toured London.

When did they tour London?

1924 and '25.

That would have been a tough time in London, post-war.

No, it wasn't really. I always think those tough times are the best times. People worked together. It was a rebuilding of everything, so, world war more so. I mean those places were flattened: London and Coventry and Berlin and Dusseldorf – absolutely flattened to the ground.

Well, particularly Coventry, it was almost destroyed, wasn't it?

It was a mess, I was there. It's very sad when you think about it.

Do you have any memories of being in England? You would have only been three. Do you remember it at all?

Remember - - -?

Being in London with your parents. Did you go with them?

No, no. They left us here, they went away.

They left you here. OK, who looked after you?

They left us with my grandmother – Grandmother Gard, Eliza Morphett. She was a bloody big strong woman, with one handicap. It was a very sad thing that happened when she was 42: a gun accident at One Tree Hill. My grandfather was unloading his shotgun after rabbit-shooting, and Nanna had just a stump there [Alf points to just below the knee]. And she was a big lady, she walked on two walking sticks, and crutches; but she was a hard Victorian disciplinarian and you had to do what you were told or she'd whack you. That stick there [Alf

points to his walking stick] – that’s all I got out of her will, because I used to cheek her a lot. I was a cheeky little bastard. And when I came home [from WWII] – she died a month before I came home from overseas.

Were you very close to your grandmother?

No. She told me she’d never leave me anything.

And she didn’t?

And she didn’t! So Dad asked me, what would I like? I said, ‘I’d like that bloody stick that she used as a sabre,’ and I tell you, she used to really use it like a sabre. That’s where I learned to duck! She was a hard old bitch.

Sounds like it.

I used to say, ‘Grandfather was a rotten shot.’

He missed.

About three feet too low!

Were your own parents disciplinarians?

Not so much, no, no. The world changed in World War II [World War I] I think. The Victorian age was really tough. You know – do what you’re told or else; kids are there to be seen and not heard.

You grew up in the Depression which was a very tough time.

Well, I was a lucky little boy, because the Gard Brothers were very rich people.

Tell me a bit about the Gard Brothers.

It was established by my grandfather, John Bailey Gard, and his brother Alf (after whom I was named) and they started off with push-bikes at North Adelaide at a shop on the corner of Ward Street and O’Connell Street, where they built the Australia Hotel. Now, my Uncle Alf was a great Church of Christ man, a very religious family all round in those days, and he conducted the big choir at the Grote Street Church of Christ. His mother laid the foundation stone there – Mary Gard laid the foundation stone at the headquarters of the Baptist Church – now I’ve lost track.

You were just saying that they set up the bike business - - -

Yes, Gard Brothers push-bikes. Uncle would not sell that property for the hotel for years, and when he died, they just took it over and built the hotel there. And then they got the Douglas agency – motor cycle – and that was a big sale. That was the dispatch bike for World War II, the Douglas. It was sold all over the world – it was the biggest seller in the world. That made them very rich people. Grandfather had a great big limousine, I forget the name of it now. Dad had a little car called a Clino. No-one had ever heard of it. It's a little like the baby Austin, called the Clino – spelled C-L-I-N-O – and they lived in luxury, really, in those very early days, in the '20s. Grandfather had this lovely two acre home right opposite the Tranmere bowling green on Magill Road. There were four pillars and a big driveway with 'Brentnall' written across the top. My Uncle Alf, he lived in the big Tranmere House which stands on the northern side of the tennis court at Tranmere – a great big wonderful place, Tranmere House. He had the western ground floor flat, there were four flats there. That's where I started really playing tennis – we'll get to that later on.

So they certainly didn't suffer through the Depression, did they?

No, no – but things went wrong in about 1934. The Douglas was sabotaged on the Isle of Man, in the factory, and the whole shipment of the Douglas's all over the world sold out very quickly, but they were all back in the workshop within three weeks for broken crank shafts, and that was the finish of the Douglas. And that's where Dad went downhill. He tried to keep it going, the Douglas. They brought out a new – belt drive – not a belt drive – a shaft drive Douglas they brought out, something completely new, but it didn't hit the market at all. So he was offered three bikes – three agencies: the James, the new Hudson and the Ariel. He took the new Hudson and the James two-stroke and the police took the Ariel. He picked a loser again, he just couldn't pick a winner! Well, in 1936 we were all closed down. Dad went broke and we were all kicked out in the street.

Literally?

Yeah. I can see Mother now with her grand piano, a Ronisch grand piano, being carted out – out on the street, and we all moved into an old home, and Nanna Thrush and Grandpa Thrush and Nanna's brother and his son and our family – about twelve of us all moved into this very old home on the corner of Clarke Street and Kensington Road – the first street up from the Britannia Hotel. It had an old slate roof, one of the oldest houses here. We lived there right up to the beginning of the war. That's what happened – the Depression just killed the lot. So we went from up there, to nothing. Now, I always look back on that as the best thing that ever happened, because what's wrong with Australia today? – too many greedy people; too many people too rich and too many people too poor. The world is all lop-sided

and you'll never get peace while that's on. There'll be another Adolf Hitler will rise. It has to happen, and it will happen. If he did nothing else, he certainly finished the Depression.

In a big way.

Yeah, and I'll give him a tick for that.

But that's all you'll give him a tick for, I hope.

He was bad, but then he went mad. He got so strong so quickly – the Youth Movement. He wanted the world, bloody nearly got it too.

He got close.

Closer than people think.

So how would you have described your childhood? You had that very wealthy background and then poverty.

I never wanted much, I never really felt the difference, I don't think. I loved my sport – tennis was my saviour. I spent a lot of my life playing tennis.

Tell me a bit about it. You said you started learning tennis at a fairly young age, didn't you?

I used to hit any ball. I had natural ball sense right from the time I can remember. I'd play with a ball all day and I used to practise with my tennis racquet – a big heavy racquet my auntie had. I was five foot four as a young bloke. I was five foot four until I was fourteen, and then I grew ten inches in twelve months, to six foot two. And that's when my tennis game changed from back court play, running around the back line, to a big serve-volley game which I was being coached for.

I don't care what they say, the only way to play tennis is serve-volley, isn't it? And I think that's what the Australians were so good at.

Well, I was very fortunate with the coach I had, Les Longstaff. He was the artist of Vardon Price and my brother worked under him at Vardon Price first of all, and Les knew I was doing pretty well and Owen did, Owen knew I was doing pretty well at school tennis, and I only had the old racquets, second-hand racquets I had. We used to go – [I was] about twelve years old when Les took me over, and Sunday mornings in the winter time we used to go up to Waterfall Gully on clay courts, and it was playing with men, not boys, men, from Memorial Drive, good players they were. I mean I learned the hard way. I learned by playing blokes. Always as a little boy, I always looked for somebody about three or four years older than me,

if they can have a game with you, like Laurie White, and I gradually built my game, but you only win by losing. You don't improve much winning all the time, so I'd always say, 'Can I have a game with you?'

So I progressed very rapidly with Les Longstaff. He was a hard man in one way – you just did as you were told. He used to get cross if you missed a sitter. He'd say, 'Don't miss sitters'. He was a bit like that chap in *Have Gun Will Travel* [Richard Boone, of the 1950s television western series], fellow with a long face – he'd look at you and sort of snarl at you, 'Get in and kill it.' He taught me to kill at tennis. I'm not a killer by instinct really, I'm quite the opposite, I'm a very sympathetic bloke – but with tennis, I just get out there to murder the opposition, I don't care who they are. It's one game I play to win; every game I won, I won – I didn't make the other bloke lose. I was always attacking, and I did it with table tennis, the same thing.

So you would have progressed from school tennis and then went into competition?

The war finished – no, I was just being privately coached before war service – I didn't finish that. We went to Waterfall Gully in the winter, summertime there was a lawn court in Young Street at Unley, and we used to get there on Sunday morning, about 6 o'clock. We'd cut the court and line it, roll it – and there were six of us, we played there all day. There'd be six chaps: all top tennis players – not top tennis players, but good tennis players – all men. And I began to knock 'em all off. Les could see that I had the will, and I put the work in, I practised hard. I used to practise a lot up against a wall. I was always very loose-limbed. Anyway - - -.

If it hadn't been for the war, would you have gone on, do you think, as a professional player?

I'm pretty certain I'd have gone right to the top but for the war. I was 17 and Les wouldn't let me play in tournaments. He'd say, 'Just come out and practise, will you?' All I did was practise – practise shots. Never mind about winning, practise shots, put the ball where you want it. And I used to put a brick down the bottom of the yard at home, and serve till I hit the brick on my service, wherever it was. I went pretty close – bit like Robin Hood, you know. Bit like Bradman with his stump and his golf ball up against the tank. I did that with tennis, for hour upon hour. Mum used to call me in to have dinner and I'd say, 'I'll be another half hour.' I worked at it hard.

You obviously had a real love of the game to put that sort of commitment in.

I had a love of my coach, and he was a hard man. A funny thing – a little story with Les: I got to play table tennis pretty well too. I beat the State champion in a five-setter during the war at Victor Harbor, Bill Fryer.

Bill Pryor, was it?

Bill Fryer.

Fryer, yep.

Yeah, we had a five-setter, it went for about an hour and a half. Had a big mob at the Crown Hotel at Victor Harbor. There was nothing much between us. But the story with Les Longstaff that I'll never forget, and I'll always admire him for it: he used to come to our place for lunch on Sundays after the tennis – for tea, not lunch – and I played him a game of table tennis. First of all, I had the pen-grip for years, and all of a sudden I changed over to the tennis-grip. I did it of my own accord. I watched some of the great players. There are great players with both, but once I got onto the tennis-grip I was a different player altogether, and I improved out of sight. Les Longstaff was very good at table tennis and we had a game of table tennis and I beat him, and we were in by the fire waiting for Mum to call us for tea, and I gave him a bit of cheek, and I sort of shaped-up to him – and he went whack – bang [Alf demonstrates a back-hander]. Oh boy, he nearly knocked my head off – ‘Don't get cheeky.’ I'll never forget that. Oh boy, he hit me hard, and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Because, once you start getting cheeky you're in trouble, and he was always very dignified and – keep control of yourself.

So it was a good early lesson for you.

That's one of the best lessons I ever had in my life. It wasn't the pain of the slap – he really hit me hard. It was, I'd hurt him – I'd hurt him and I was sad about that. It was all in fun, really. I'd just beaten him at table tennis and he didn't like it very much! Anyway, little story of how small things can make a big difference to you. A good slap across the face doesn't hurt anybody, if you've asked for it.

In those early years when you were growing up, I know you were very musical, from your parents; you had a gift for sport – where did you see your life going, as a teenager? Did you give it thought as to what you'd be, when you were older?

All I wanted to do was play tennis. You know, I'd learned the piano for eight years and still don't know my notes, still don't know my music – I'm not musical.

But you can sing.

Oh, some say I can.

Your daughter has told me you can sing, and I've heard a little bit of tape where you can sing.

I have – I have performed well, but I've never followed it right through. I was a finalist in the *News and Mail Aria* in 1953, but I had to broadcast football all the afternoon before the final. Fred Williamson said, 'You would have run second if they'd given you the afternoon off,' but the ABC wouldn't let me off. I was screaming my head off all day but - - -.

So you really saw your life with sport, from an early age?

I had an ambition to be an opera singer and follow my parents. I had the ambition but I didn't put the work in. You see, I just haven't got that sort of a brain; I find it very hard to remember lines. Les Dayman, the actor –

Yes, I remember him.

– Les Dayman came up to me, he said, 'You'd be the greatest dramatic actor in the world if you'd only get off your arse and come on stage.' I said, 'I can't remember lines, Les, I'm sorry.'

But it's good that you recognised that early, isn't it, rather than giving yourself false hope?

I still can't remember – I was no good at poetry. I could write poetry but I couldn't remember it. I'm a creative – it's a creative mind, I know. Even at school my mind was always wandering, I was never listening to the teacher. Old W.P. Nicholls – the number of times he threw a bloody duster at me, with a wooden background; I'd just duck, missed again.

I've read some of the things that you've written so, as you said, you've got that creative mind to write –

Yes.

– but not necessarily to get on the stage and act it.

No, that's right. I like to create – acting is really re-enacting something that's already happened.

So you've got that creative drive within you though?

My mind is always fanning outwards. I mean, at the ABC – Colin Hayes, he told people, 'Alf's got the most creative headlines.' I was his public relations officer. He told a lot of people,

'You can always tell when Alf Gard has got something different, because it's different.' I love that word. I love things to be different. And so, you have nothing different without creative people. They don't get paid, trouble is ideas - - -.

Ideas don't mean money do they?

They don't pay for ideas, they pinch them.

But thank God we've got creative people around.

Well that's it, that's it. I mean take the great composers; read your history books – they were all dead before their works were recognised.

And most of them were paupers.

Other people make fortunes out of it.

And that still happens.

But that doesn't matter really. The creative people – all they want to do is create. So, who cares – who cares?

Well, we leave it to maybe the next generation or to someone else.

If you create something, you make something new for other people who don't create.

That's exactly what we're doing now isn't it? We're creating something for the next generation.

Exactly. They're very important people to have, but they don't pay for it. They just think, oh he's just natural, like with race broadcasting – he's just got a natural ability.

Like with tennis – you said from a young boy, you had that ball ability, that you knew that you were good at it, so you practised it so that you were very good at it.

You have to. I don't care how good you are at anything, you've got to practise, you've got to keep it up.

I think in most sports there are a lot of gifted people – but the gift is the start they have to work at to get the skill, don't they?

There's no easy way. My mother, I remember my mother when she was interviewed by Mr Treloar from Canberra, from the archives – I was with her when she was 88, and he asked, 'Mrs Gard, what would you suggest people should do to become great at what they want to

do?’ ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘that’s very easy to answer: one word – W-O-R-K – work.’ And she said it like that. You won’t get anywhere unless you work at it – and it is true.

And that’s what you followed, wasn’t it?

I did with my tennis; I did it with my racing – I had to, because I haven’t got a photographic memory like some of the boys today. I could not call three and four race meetings a week, like Terry McAuliffe. The young blokes today – it’s developed over the years with one listening to the other. That’s the beauty of recordings: recordings of young people, with tape recordings, with jockeys. I’ve said to young jockeys, ‘If you can’t learn to ride by watching slow-motion – you look at the great riders on a horse – it’s all there for you in slow-motion. If you can’t learn from that, then what hope have you got?’ Swimming: it’s amazing what the underwater camera did for swimming. I was there with Dawn Fraser when she was 16 at the baths when they first introduced the underwater cameras, and to see her underwater – in the old days the stroke used to come over and pull there – that way [Alf demonstrates]. Now, it’s this way, and the pull you get from there, to there, has made all the difference to swimming. They’ve broken records galore, and it was all done by underwater cameras, and by watching.

I’ll move on to that shortly, but I’d like to talk about going to war, because you were very young.

I was 19. I was 17 when the war broke out.

So, you volunteered?

Yeah.

Why? I know that’s a silly question, but I’d like to know why.

Well, my Uncle Owen was killed in World War I in 1917 at Passchendaele Ridge, and my brother was named after him in 1919. So that was always in my mind, that he didn’t come back; but a chap named Les Newell (?) was one of my best mates at work at the ABC – an announcer, and he was a lovely looking bloke, handsome, vigorous – just a beaut bloke. He used to tear all over the place. We used to race up and down the stairs, everywhere. Les and I competed a lot. He was about two years older than me – he was an announcer. He joined the air force, and he was killed night-flying at Point Cook – and that’s really what caused me to join up. I said to Dad, I’m going. Dad wouldn’t let me go at 17 – people did get in at 17 and 16, but he wouldn’t let me go until I was 19. I had to go to his lawyer’s office, Magnus Badger, with all the forms and Magnus said, ‘He’s going to go Harold, so let him go.’ He said, ‘I’m not going to let him go.’

Did your father say why he didn't want you to go?

Well, his brother was killed at the war, the First World War – you know, we don't want to lose another one. But all the boys were going anyway – not many went from the ABC, very few, because that was a government position and you didn't have to go.

It was one of the reserved occupations.

Yes. So I –

But you were determined to go?

– I wanted to get out anyway. I wasn't very happy at that time. I was being buggerised around by them as office boy and junior clerk. They gave me a printing machine and Gestetner and the old Alden machine (hand-fed) doing hundreds and hundreds of programs - - -.

So, it wasn't much of a job then?

A hell of a job, I was there until 7 or 8 o'clock on Friday nights. I had to finish that before I went home.

Why did you pick the air force? Because most people joined up for the army, didn't they?

Yeah, but the Spitfire – when it was doing a peel-off – it was on the screens – that big elliptical when it does the peel-off. I just loved it. I thought, geez I'm gonna fly one of those. Nobody had ever flown in our family. Dad couldn't understand it; my brother – I wouldn't ride a motor bike - - -.

But you'd fly a plane?

Yeah, my brother reckoned, 'You're scared to ride a motor bike.' I said, 'I don't like motor bikes.' Right from a boy, I could've had a motor bike when I was 16, but I can't see the point in motor bikes – they're too powerful, without protection. At least with a car, you've got a body around you, but a motor bike, that twist-grip, you've only got to touch it and it jumps. My nephew, Peter Linn, he wanted a motor bike, and I'd seen him in a car and I said to my sister, Dr Linn, his mother, I said, 'Don't let Peter get on a motor bike, he'll get killed.' I said, 'He's that sort of a bloke.'

Talk me through the process. You were 19 and you were finally going to join the RAAF. What was the process after you'd filled out the forms and stuff – what happened next?

We got called up. We were all lined up at the top of the ramp at Adelaide Railway Station, about 40 of us. Corporal Rice was in charge of our flight and he yelled 'You haven't got a name, you're just a bloody number.' You daren't say boo. They were right on top of you. Next thing we're down at Victor Harbor and the first morning he came around and tipped all our beds arse-up, tipped us out of bed, under the cold shower, out on the parade ring – and this new life. I didn't like it at first, but grew to love it.

So they were all young boys, like yourself?

Oh, great great time, great time.

And what sort of training did you do at Victor Harbor?

Training – same as the army.

Right – the marching, the drill, the usual - - -

Up and down, up and down, route marches, cross-countries.

How long was that training?

I was there – actually I failed the first month, failed my exams. Again, you see, no good at school. So they gave me another chance, and I think P.O. Hamilton could see that I was way above average as an athlete. I ran second in the marathon which was over the back country and over the river and along the beach. I was a long way back coming down the beach from Port Elliot to Victor Harbor. I reckon I was a half mile behind the leaders and I started just to stride out and I hit the front about 100 yards from home, and then a professional runner beat me in the last few strides. And I went to three boxing tournaments – I got beaten in all three.

Was that part of your training?

No, no – volunteer. They played boxing tournaments. I went in – the first fight I had was against Les Frewin and he was an amateur. I used to watch him down at the Grenfell Street Stadium. He was one of the top amateurs here. And when I got down, Corporal Rice was looking after me in my corner and I was as nervous as a cat – wasn't even 11 stone, I was like a rake. Les Frewin came into his corner and I said to the corporal, 'That's Les Frewin, he's about the best in the state!' He said, 'Yeah, but I told him not to kill ya, just pull a few pieces of bloody flesh off ya,' which he did for three two-minute rounds. I had bits and pieces off me everywhere. He didn't knock me out, but he gave me a real boxing lesson.

Then the second fight was with Peter O'Connor, one of my best mates and we shook hands and he said, 'Now, no hitting hard.' In the second round I hit him in the solar plexus and down he went on his knees, and I went over and said, 'Oh Peter, I'm sorry.' Corporal Rice said, 'Get back in the neutral corner, get back in the neutral corner!' Then Peter came up underneath me, bang, and I'm gone. And the third fight: I'd started to learn a bit with long left and just boxing, moving around, I was quick on my feet – a chap named Joe Tiperon, he was the heavyweight champion of the police force – nobody would fight him. Corporal Rice (I was 6 foot 2), he said, 'We've watched you, you've improved rapidly – just go in there and box him, don't try and fight him, just box him; hit him with your left, dance around, move away – it'll be hard to hit you.' In the first two rounds, I'm just killing him on points, miles in front of him, and then Corporal Rice said, 'See if you can use your right.' Well I tried to use my right and I woke up in the dressing-room about two hours later – out cold, like I'd been hit by a piece of 4 x 2. But, that's the reason I got the second chance. P.O. Hamilton said, 'This bloke's got a bit of guts, give him another go.' And I scraped through. Then we went out to Parafield.

How long were you at Victor Harbor for the training?

About two and half, three months. That's where I met Keith Miller - - -.

Who became quite a hero, didn't he, to all of Australia, let alone to you? So you met him at Victor?

Keith Miller came in Course 24. I was Course 23 – I missed out on that and I went through to Course 24, and Bill Fryer and I were playing table tennis in the canteen. In walked this bloke, 'I'm Keith Miller.' 'Goodday Keith – the Keith Miller?' 'Yeah, the Keith Miller – I'll play the winner.' Well, Bill won that night; Keith killed us both. He just wiped us off the table. He was one of the greatest guys I ever knew, or ever will know.

Tell me a bit about Keith Miller, and what he meant to you.

He was the same build as me. We were very alike in many ways. He was going to be a jockey when he was fourteen – he was 5 foot 4 and he grew to 6 foot 2.

Same as yourself.

Same – same thing. But we hit it off right from the start. He was interested in race horses. We used to jump the fence and go and have a bet. I will say this: he's a terrific man, I admire him, but Keith was Keith Miller – himself. I'd never say I was a great friend of Keith Miller's. We were mates in a way, but Keith was a man on his own, he was like a knight in royal

armour. He was just so outstanding, all round. It didn't matter what you did. Sergeant Trenethick, drill instructor: he had us out for unarmed defence. He had a broomstick. He said, 'I can take this off anyone of you blokes,' and Miller said, 'Don't think so, Sarg.' 'Come out here Miller.' Next thing Miller's got him up, aeroplane spin, dumped him on his back and got the bloody broomstick sticking in his chest.

He was just a lion. Playing football he'd come over the top of a pack and flatten the whole pack. He'd come from behind – just had timing. Everything about Miller – the thing with Miller, he responded to a challenge. He couldn't give a darn about winning. He played cricket, he loved cricket, he loved football, he loved sport – but he was not a killer. He was at his top when Australia was in trouble; he could swing a game with the bat or the ball in an hour. I've seen him do it. He always took the initiative – we had that one thing in common, he took the initiative. The poms got on top of us and he came in at number four I think it was, at the Adelaide Oval, and the poms were knocking us over. The first ball he just came down a couple of strides and a straight drive right up where the Bradman stand is: six, first ball. He just took the initiative straight away. You'd never get on top of Miller. I used to say to blokes, 'Don't challenge him.' They'd say, 'He's got a big head.' I said, 'He's better than he thinks he is.' Like Lindsay Head – Arnold Ewens [ABC sporting commentator] and I used to argue about this – 'He's got a big head.' I said, 'He hasn't got a big head, he's a champion.'

Well he proved that – how many Magarey Medals did he win?

Three.

Three, didn't he?

But he was such a nice guy. I interviewed him when he was a cadet in the army. I just took a liking to him. Arnold said, 'He's cheeky and got a big head.' I said, 'No he hasn't Arnold, you're wrong.' Champions have not got big heads – they're bloody good.

Keith Miller went on to have quite a reputation too, didn't he?

He had a reputation, but it was all wrong. They called him a womaniser - - -.

There was a show on TV quite recently on ABC about him, I think, wasn't there?

I didn't see it.

I'm sure I've seen something in the last few months. Anyway, go on – he had a reputation as a womaniser, but you say it wasn't warranted?

Women used to plague him – they were ‘manisers’. He wasn’t a womaniser, women were ‘manisers’. They wouldn’t leave him alone, they’d drive him crazy. There was one sheila in the social set-up at Memorial Drive – I went up to her and said, ‘For God’s sake, leave him alone, will you.’ He got rude to her in the finish.

Guess that happens with lots of champion sportsmen, doesn’t it – women chase them?

Miller was so outstanding, he was a real knight. I tried to get him a knightship. I wrote to Buckingham Palace trying to get him a knighthood, but the Australian Government by that time had closed it down – no knighthoods. I used to ring Keith on his birthday every year, and I wrote to Richie Benaud and Ian Chappell to try and get them behind it. Richie Benaud wrote back and said, ‘Do you think he’d want one?’ It was a very very clever remark, I thought. I doubt whether Miller did, but when I eventually told Miller what I was doing he said, ‘Try and get me a lordship, Freddie.’ He called me Freddie at Victor Harbor. He said, ‘Alf doesn’t suit you.’ It probably cost me a fortune – my Uncle Alf died and left a lot of money, and left me nothing. Dad always said he didn’t like it when you came back as Flying Officer, Freddie Gard. There was a picture in the Women’s Weekly with an unformal [sic] dress length on my sister, and he didn’t like it at all. Up him anyway!

Why not! After the three months at Victor Harbor, what was the next step? Where did you go after that?

I went to Parafield. Parafield – I was very unfortunate, and fortunate, in a way. It’s one of the sad days of my life: a chap named Ian Hunter, one of my best cobblers, we teamed up a bit, and Sergeant Broadfoot. I was doing my second circuit as a solo – I’d just gone solo. I did one circuit, came in and landed, and then I went back to the roadway and straightened up and got my green light at Gawler in a small paddock and I aimed just to the left of the control tower on my take-off, and I got to about, I reckon 50, 60 feet above the control tower, and I’m here [Alf demonstrates the position] and all of a sudden I saw this other kite coming here – and it was just a reflex action. I threw everything into the corner; I did a steep rising turn – second circuit solo – just a reflex action, and got up a couple of hundred feet and then went across wind, and when I looked out of the cockpit down to the ground, there was the other aircraft, nose on the ground, right by the control tower. And Sergeant Broadfoot was killed outright, and Ian died eight days later. I was exonerated, I was cleared, but I can see it now – like a big moth, just out of the corner of my eye. There was an enquiry into it.

He was in a training flight himself?

Yes.

What were you flying when you were training?

Tiger Moths. I had a similar thing happen at Uranquinty on Wirraways, about three months later at the Service Flying School in New South Wales.

Before we move to that, how long were you training at Parafield?

I was set back a course there too – I got German measles right at the end of that course. That course went to Canada. I stayed back and did the course again because of German measles, I was a very sick bloke – Parafield, about three or four months.

Right, and then you moved on to New South Wales, did you say?

Yes, Uranquinty on Wirraways.

Where's that?

Near Wagga Wagga. It's all open country, flat country, like Hay – and all that desert country ---.

And so that was more training?

Yes ---.

Still in Tiger Moths?

We were service flying on Wirraways which most pilots will tell you, if you can fly a Wirraway you can fly any kite, and it's true.

I've never heard of them – what are they?

Single engines, like the Harvard, Miles Master. It's a difficult plane to fly. The Wirraway had one danger: it used to stall without warning in a steep turn, and we were all told about it. When you're doing a steep turn, you go to pull tighter and tighter, but you get a shudder before it stalls, and then it goes 'bang', into a spin. The Wirraway didn't have any shudder. Lots of blokes were killed in Wirraways doing tail-chases – trying to outdo one another, and too close to the ground. You daren't do much in a Wirraway under 6000 feet. You'd go to 10,000 and be pretty safe. It was true, we all had to try and do it.

Was the Wirraway an Australian plane?

Yes – I remember doing it myself. You'd pull it tighter and tighter and 'boof' – and you were in a spin – no warning.

That's a little bit frightening!

Well, it happened to so many blokes. Anyway, the near accident was with my mate Bruce Sellick – Gwen Collett's son, the great singer – and Bruce Sellick and I teamed up. We went out to do dive bombing, to practise dive bombing. We went out in pairs: you go to 6000 feet, peel off and dive and drop your bomb, then up again and do about six bombs at a time. We always liked to have a bit of a race around the place and a bit of a dogfight, Bruce and I. So we did that and I said, 'I'll race you back to the drome.' I was coming in on a powered approach, and he came in on my wrong side, in a gliding approach. Luckily, like at Parafield, I just caught him right near the ground – we weren't more than 10 feet off the ground, and he was nosing in on me. And again, I did a steep turn, ground level, and we missed. He landed and I went on across the drome, and on the other side of the drome there were tall old gum trees near swampy land, and that was a hell of a bloody flight. I was down low, I had to get my flaps up and my wheels up – and the shock of it, I was just glad we'd missed, otherwise we would have both been burned to death for sure.

Gwen Collett and my mother were great friends and Gwen Collett said, 'Bruce phoned me to say Alf saved his life'. I said, 'Pigs arse, I saved my own life!' So – I'll never forget that when I went across and I was like that [Alf demonstrates], in and out the gum trees. I got through there, I'm buggered if I know how it ever happened. Then I got above average for my wings test, and I think that's one of the greatest days, to get above average in a course of about 40 and there were five wing test blokes who were above average.

How long were you training on the Wirraways?

Same thing – couple of months. And then off we went to England.

Did you have much knowledge of what was actually happening in the war? I know we often get – the public news is very filtered as to how much information we actually get, as to how bad it is.

They kept a lot of secrets - - -.

So you would have gone over a bit blind.

We didn't know, we were no better advised - - -.

You knew as much as the public.

We just did what we were told, we got shoved everywhere.

When did you leave Australia?

1942.

Where did you leave from?

Melbourne.

Sailed out?

We went out on the *Stirling Castle* – no, *New Amsterdam* – came home on the *Stirling Castle*. And the *Louis Pasteur* – we went from Halifax to Liverpool, Gosford, Atlantic Ocean – ran into a wolfpack half way across, the last of the big wolfpacks. That was a frightening night. I was on the Oerlikon [gun] turret, six of us: Brian de Corsey, Andy Lang, Ross Shepherd, John Sullivan. Brian de Corsey and I volunteered to go up on the Oerlikon turrets, 20 mm. – about 2 o'clock in the bloody morning it was, cold, wet, raining like hell. We all had our south-westers on, and we couldn't do anything if anything had happened. Next thing, 'Wolfpack, 800 yards off the starboard bow,' and the *Louis Pasteur*, she went back the other way for three or four hours. There was no escort – 6000 of us on board, and we got to England.

How long did it take to get there?

Six days, it was usually four, we had that extra two days. Then we went down to Bournemouth and they billeted us with private people at Bournemouth, and it was the last of the bombing raids – came in over England, and we were all out on the lawns – Sunday morning, low cloud, and some of the boys were playing midget golf out on the lawns; other blokes were at the hotel in Norfolk. I was in the hotel with Keith Miller ten minutes before the raid. The sirens went and we all thought it was just practice, because there hadn't been any raids for a long time. All of a sudden this squadron of Focker Wolves came in under the cloud base and up the town, and they bombed and strafed – 600 were killed that morning at Bournemouth – so they were out to get us.

They knew that you were all there, presumably.

They knew there was a bunch of us, all pilots.

So they were all pilots that were killed, air-crew?

Yes, and then they shifted us over to Brighton into two hotels on the seafront – a lot closer to Germany.

How many of you were moved over to Brighton?

About 300 of us: the *Metropol* and the *Grand*.

The Brighton Grand is quite well-known, isn't it?

Yeah. I said, 'They're trying to get us killed, the bastards.'

They were trying to get you killed before you even got to the planes.

Well there was no doubt they were after the bunch of us. They tried to get us on the *Louis Pasteur* on the Atlantic.

How many squadrons – I'm not familiar with the terminology – but 300, how many squadrons would that have been?

About 40.

And were you with British fighters as well?

No, Canadians usually, and Australians - - -.

You were with the Canadians.

Yes.

How long did they leave you at Brighton?

Not long – we got billeted out. I went over to the Lake District for about six weeks, because they had a big pilot pool there. They wanted me to go with the bombers and I wouldn't go. I wouldn't convert onto bombers. I said, 'I'm flying Spitfires or I'm not flying at all.'

That's what you joined up for, wasn't it, the Spitfires? So you were allowed to refuse? You said you refused to go on bombers.

I had no desire to fly with anybody, I'm a dead-set loner – I know I am, I still am. I wasn't prepared to be responsible for a crew. I know I'd do something stupid in a bomber and take the crew with me - - -.

Whereas in a Spitfire, it's just you.

Just yourself. I've always been that way. With tennis, I prefer singles, I can play doubles – only trouble is my partner used to get wild with me because I'd take everything on the net. He said, 'Don't I ever get a chance?' I said, 'Not while I'm around you won't. If I can see a shot I'll play it.'

How long did you have to wait to get a Spitfire?

I did my O.T.U.

Sorry, what's O.T.U.?

Operational Training School.

Where did you do that?

At Kirton Lindsey.

Where's that?

That's up in the northern country, above Yorkshire.

And what happened after the training?

I missed out on that course and they sent me out to North Africa.

DISC 2 recorded on 7 May 2012

– All because I failed my Intermediate [completion of a conversation which took place between tapes] – but go on.

When we finished the previous tape Alf, you'd just said that you got sent off to Africa – after your training, and I - - -.

Yes, number three ferry unit, and I ferried Spitfires and Hurricanes and Mustangs and Corsairs from Casablanca right up through to Tunis; across to Sicily and up into northern Italy – up to the front lines, and I had to bring back aircraft that needed servicing – fly them back to Algiers at Maison Blanche, for servicing. I did that for about 12 months and then I did a conversion on the Hellcats to go into fleet air-arm.

That was pretty dangerous work though, the countries you were flying - - -.

We were flying across the sea a lot.

Yes, but you were still flying through war zones, weren't you?

Oh yes, bloody oath!

How dangerous was it for you?

Extremely dangerous when unarmed. We used to fly in threes. I took it on my own sometimes, either flying across the sea or across the desert. Caldwell, the famous ace, he's written that most fliers don't like flying a single engine aircraft across the water. There was a lot of that. It's a pretty fair trip from Tunis to Catania. I flew one across – three of us went from Catania to Tripoli, 300 miles, went over the top of Malta. We were stupid – my fault – there was a party on at the aerodrome – Captain England and Major (?) I led that little threesome. I said, 'Let's take the shortcut and we won't go back to Tunis and around the coast – we'll go straight across the sea.' The pair of bastards they were! One went that way and one went that way [Alf points in different directions] until they were little specks in the sky. They were having me on, and I'm the leader. We came right up over the top of Tripoli, thank goodness, we had very little petrol left – stupidest thing we could do, three Spitfires – better not print that! – I don't care if you do.

So you would have been getting shot at, quite a lot while you were on the ferry run, or you were in pretty safe regions when you were doing most of it?

No, we never knew. You never knew it was over territory – you never knew where they were, especially Italy and North Africa – the bloody Arabs. I got on well with Arabs, but you could never be sure what they'd do. We used to low-fly a lot over the desert. Georgie Wicks, he was a pommy – bedouins used to come with sticks all piled up on top of their heads. He'd come down low over them, next thing they were on the ground and sticks everywhere! He was a bugger, Georgie Wicks!

In the ferry unit, was it Australians, English and Canadians doing the flying – when you were in that ferry unit was it mainly Australians - - -?

No, South Africans.

All sorts.

I flew with Norwegians, a Pole: Major Vukomanovic, he was 46 – he could have killed us both at El Alamein. We took some Spitfires out to Cairo West; we picked up a Marauder to fly back, rather than go in a Dakota. He said, 'I can fly anything.' The Marauder was a marvellous machine but took a long take-off, about 120 miles an hour to take-off. He'd never flown one, I hadn't flown one. I said, 'Well come on, let's go'. We got to El Alamein overnight. Next morning we taxied out, and he didn't use the whole runway. He came in a sort of a triangle but then there was another 150 yards that you could have used. He said, 'We'll take off from here, this is all right.' I said, 'It's a bit dangerous' – so off we go, speeding across the bloody drome and we got pretty close to the fence and I pulled the undercart up and we just

squashed over the fence, and that's all. But that 150 yards – I said, 'You silly old bastard.' He said, 'I want to die flying.' I said, 'Well I'm bugged if I do!' That's what he wanted – he was 46. He was a marvellous old flyer – had thousands of hours up. Major Vukomanovic, he was a big tall Yugoslav – I've got a beaut picture of him and Kowalski at Cairo West. I got on with everybody - - -.

What about when you weren't flying? I mean you were in countries you'd only ever heard of. What was it like when you were at the bases and in the towns, particularly in North Africa, what was that like for you?

We used to just wander around. We played sport mainly – table tennis mainly.

Did you get to see much of the towns and the people of the countries you were in?

Oh yes.

Any particular memories from there?

Italy – I always loved Italy.

Why was that?

I think it's the whole climate and the people themselves. I only wish I'd learned to speak the language. I wasted my time there – too much playing up with the boys. You know, you never knew when tomorrow's going to be the last day.

We know about the mateship of Australian soldiers and a lot of it was because of that – you didn't know when your last day was going to be, did you?

It's true, no-one did. I mean, once we started flying we knew bloody well – people were getting knocked over every day. A good mate of mine, Baxter, a Canadian bloke, out night flying at Advanced Training at Nantwich up near Crewe. I did the 12 o'clock midnight two hours, night flying, and I came back and got into bed; Baxter was walking out the room as I walked in – five minutes later, 'Bang' – he crashed on take-off – burned to death. And a chap named Clem Halborn, (?) he was killed in a very unfortunate accident too. When you've got a pack of blokes gear up and write a letter to his family – people were getting killed all the time.

You'd never get over that experience though, would you? I mean that probably still affects you today.

You do, you do, it's part of life. You begin to realise it's all around you – it's not just here, it's everywhere. 60,000,000 people were killed in World War II – God knows how many were

injured. You just became a pawn in a big game; you did what you were told and to the best of your ability. I don't know how we ever won the bloody thing actually – we were so far behind. We gave them a big start – thanks to Mr Chamberlain.

Were you aware of the bigger political picture? Back in Australia we were hearing a bit about – particularly that Churchill was selling us out, and things like that. On the front you wouldn't have been aware of any of that, would you?

We didn't know, no, we just did our job – that was enough. We were just a team, it's like a footy team. It's combined operations, that's what wins, and that's what's lacking today. Everybody with the same outlook working together and that was the beauty of the war. The public service are anything but servants – that's the trouble with Australia, there's too many of them. They've joined a bloody big union now and they just do what they like and get salary rises just like that [Alf clicks his fingers]. Then the big boys, bureaucrats: 10%, 10%, 10% – well 10% on 400,000 is 40,000 – that's the next rise they'll get.

Well, it's coming up fairly shortly, after the budget.

I know, 40,000.

That's an interesting question: how much were you paid in the air force?

Oh, peanuts.

So it was just a very small salary, wasn't it?

I was looking at my papers last night as a matter of fact: war gratuity after five years – £152.

And what was that for?

War gratuity was something the government had put aside over five years – £152 – £15 [sic] a bloody year – it's a joke.

But then it wasn't about the money, was it?

No, but you see, the Yanks got properly paid.

Did you have much to do with the Yanks when they came into the war?

Yeah, I got on wonderfully well with the Yanks. I was going to go to Japan with the 77 Fighter Unit on Mustangs, when I met Jay, and Jay – one of the big changes in my life when I met Jay Wood.

Tell me about that.

We'll go into that, but it's another story.

All right, that's fine. How long were you doing that run between Italy and Northern Africa?

How long? About 12 months.

Where did you go after that?

I was playing table tennis in Algiers and I was playing a bloody squadron leader, a Pommy squadron leader, and I killed him 21-3 for memory, I know he didn't get many, not many people did. I used to hit them off the table, not boasting, I just had a big game, everything, big pass. A captain of an aircraft carrier was having a drink at the bar – wish I could remember his name now, bugged if I can. He called me over, said 'I'd like to buy you a drink – you play a pretty good game of table tennis.' I said, 'I've been playing a long time.' He said, 'But you killed him.' I said, 'Yeah that's right, I did.' He said, 'What are you doing out here?' and I told him. He said, 'How'd you like to join my ship?' I said, 'I'd love to get out of here, I'd love to get in to some sort of action.' He said, 'Right, I'll go and see your Head Warden and you go down to Cairo West and do a conversion on the Hellcats,' which I did.

What's a Hellcat?

That's navy, it's something like a Wirraway.

Like the navy version.

Navy fighter – Fleet Air Arm. Yes I passed that test easily enough – entirely different aircraft to a Spitfire – but I got to fly any bloody thing, doesn't matter, it's an aeroplane with wings. I did a silly thing there too, I always do silly things. They used to come in over the fence; an aircraft carrier, you've got to fly them on power approach – they come down and they catch you with a hook. But you've got to fly them right down, and put them down. So he said, 'When you come over, 140 miles an hour.' Most guys, 90 or 100. So what do I do? I come over the fence at – I said, 'I'll show him, I'll do a bloody gliding approach'. I'll never forget that – the hangar was there (Alf demonstrates) and the paths, airstrip was here, and he was here in front of the stand. I came over here, I cut the motor here, and she went BANG – bounced about 30 feet. It just went like a log. I thought it was going to break the bloody thing in halves. I gave it full bore, flattened out and came a three pointer. He didn't see it. The sound – the hangar blocked it out. He said, 'That was bloody perfect.' I said, 'Yeah, you didn't see the first time, I finished up in the sea!'

But you lived to tell the story - - -.

Yeah, I was always out to do it my way, and you can be silly. I've got that streak in me that somebody says do it this way, I'll do it the other way. I can't help myself. If somebody says that's the way to do something, well, I'll find another way. It's just me. I can't help it.

And you're not going to change, are you?

No.

What was the name of the aircraft carrier?

I couldn't tell you.

That's certainly a big change of circumstances.

No, I couldn't tell you – it was going out to the Far East, Burma.

What was it like being on an aircraft carrier? It would have been a completely different world.

I never did – they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, just shortly afterwards. I never got to fly the Fleet Arm, never got to join them. They kept us then in Cairo, and we got held up in Cairo for six weeks, to get on a boat to come home.

So you were in Cairo when the atomic bomb was dropped?

Yes.

How did you hear about it?

Well, everybody heard about it.

Yeah, but can you remember the moment you were told?

Of course we could, bloody oath, it was a great relief. It was about bloody time, should have done it a long time before.

And so, for you, that was the end of the war.

It was the end of the war for everybody, except for six weeks we were stationed at a place on the Great Bitter Lake, part of the Suez Canal. They had a big sporting club there, the Lido – we were honorary members of the Gezira Sporting Club in Cairo, and we had a ball for six weeks, doing bugger all: gambling, playing cards, table tennis, swimming in the Great Bitter

Lake. You couldn't sink – it's seven times more buoyant than other places – salty. You'd stand up, and just float all day; and we did some yachting. The boats were sailing through there – all being fully loaded at Southampton, Naples, Port Said. We finished up getting on at Aden after six weeks, where I was bitten by a mosquito which gave me malaria a few weeks later.

You hadn't had any injuries during the war?

No.

So you got malaria on the way home.

I had illnesses in England. I had pleurisy and pneumonia two or three times. I hated the bloody place. I didn't fly as well in England as I could. I've always had bronchial trouble, and I always had trouble – come back with bleeding ears.

And they're things that stayed with you: the pleurisy and that type of thing – did that stay with you for a long time?

I was always prone to it. I had it when I came home two or three times. Then I got on to penicillin – Doctor Downing, Doctor Cowling – they gradually got on top of it. I had a lot of penicillin injections.

What was the name of the ship that you sailed home on?

The *Stirling Castle* – that was a story.

Tell me about the trip home.

We slept on deck – Evans Padden, we teamed up in Cairo, we played a lot of tennis together. Evans was the world sculling champion, professional, good all-round sport, a terrific bloke. We teamed up in everything in Cairo. We decided we'd sleep on deck, just with a mae-west, sleep on the deck. It was pretty warm.

How many people would have been on board coming home?

I suppose two or three thousand.

Can you remember what you felt – when the bomb dropped you said, thank God, it's over. What did you think about the war – what was it to you?

A wonderful experience of mateship. I got to love it actually, and that's why I was going to go to Japan with 77 fighter wing on Mustangs. I was going to make a career out of it, but the little red-head knocked me out.

Maybe it's about time you talked about the little red-head.

She was wonderful.

Where did you meet?

At the Hindmarsh Hotel. It was Christmas time and I was drinking with Thelma Marsh and Frances Lois. I was still in uniform. I had no intention of getting married or anything. I was going to wait another month – I had a month's leave and I was going to go to Japan. And this, she came in, and I can see her now: put her arm up on the frame of the doorway and said, 'Anybody seen Keith Michell?' She was dressed in a light blue linen frock and a big white brimmed hat and a little light blue bow around it and white shoes with the toes out of it, and she looked fantastic.

You can still see her there, can't you?

Well, she was a cross between Jeanne Crain, Paulette Goddard and Susan Hayward.

Your daughter showed me a photo of her, and she was gorgeous, wasn't she?

She was, she was, but it was her whole spirit – she was such a live-wire. She was just – I wrote a song – I should have brought the tape, I'll bring it tomorrow.

OK.

I wrote a song called *Jacqueline*, and Bill Harrison [musician and music producer] put a little improvisation on the piano. I've got it at home somewhere, and I'll bring it down and play it to you. It's a good lyric. Laura Harrison, Bill's wife, she heard it down in the kitchen. She said, 'Did you write that?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'It's beautiful.' But it's never been written into music. Mary Brannigan, a good friend of mine, a singer – she's in Tasmania now – she's got the tape and she was going to put it down as music for me, but she never has. It's years and years ago now. I was very proud of that little song. But she – I just said to the girls, 'Who in the hell was that?' They said, 'That's Jackie Wood, she's the star-turn at the ABC.' I said, 'Yeah, I reckon.'

So how did you approach her?

Well, the next morning I went to the ABC and I was walking through the passageway – a little bridge goes across which joins the two buildings together and Jay’s office - - -.

Where was the ABC then?

In Hindmarsh Square, by the old church there.

Yes, I know where you mean.

And she was Stafford Dyson’s secretary – the producer of drama. I was walking past this door – and those round rubbers they used for typewriters, hard rubber, came past my nose, up against the wall – and this voice from the room, ‘Bum-titty-fart!’ That’s what Jay used to say when she made a mistake – bum-titty-fart. So I looked in the door and there she is sitting there. I said, ‘Gooday,’ and I sat on the corner of her desk and we started to talk. I said, ‘How’d you pull up after yesterday?’ She said, ‘Shocking, shocking.’ I said, ‘Well come and have a couple of beers with me.’ ‘Oh, I couldn’t, I couldn’t.’ She was so – she looked bloody terrible. I said, ‘Come and have a couple of beers, you’ll feel better.’ So we did, and she did feel better. That’s how it all started.

Tell me a bit about the romance.

It all happened very quickly.

You swept her off her feet, did you?

No, it was the other way around – she swept me off my feet. I should have never asked her to marry me – she was miles too good for me.

I’m sure she wouldn’t think that.

No, she was – she was going with Keith Michell [actor].

She was going out with him?

Yeah. Keith was a good friend. He spent a lot of time at our place; my mother helped him with his music and my brother taught him to paint, or helped him to paint.

So did she drop Keith Michell straight away for you?

No, I just kept trying, that’s all. I look back now - - -. [A short pause occurs in the recording]

Are you ready? We were just talking about when you met your wife, and you had a fairly quick courtship, did you?

Yes, we met in December 1945 and we were married on the 10th April 1947.

That's pretty quick – '46 or '47?

'47.

Tell me about the wedding – where did you get married?

St. John's Church, everybody did in the Gard/Thrush family, and the Frearsons.

Where's St. John's?

St. John's in Halifax Street. My Grandmother Thrush was a Sarah Frearson. The Frearsons were very involved with the administration of St. John's – and marriages way back for three or four generations – all been married at St. John's.

And you went on to have a couple of children, didn't you?

Oh yeah.

You want to just say on the record who they are? – the names of your children and when they were born.

The names?

Yeah, I know, but just for the sake of the tape, who your children are.

Well there's Timothy John Brentnall – Brentnall had to go in for the family name –

Yep.

– Gard, and Deborah Woodford.

And when were they born, what years?

Tim was born in 1949 and Deb was born in 1953.

And were you a pretty proud Dad in those early days?

I reckon!

I reckon you might have been.

I was a lucky man with the two of them. I'm very proud of the both of them. They were not much trouble at all, I don't think so.

And your wife – she was pretty pleased to have one of each?

Oh yes, we were, to get the pigeon pair is good.

And you were happy with two, you didn't want to have any more?

No.

Around that era most families were having two or three, whereas previous generations had been, half a dozen or something.

We couldn't afford it anyway. I mean, I think you can have what you can afford, but two – you're hoping it will be good company, and I think Tim and Deb got on pretty well together. There was two years and 10 - - -.

That's important isn't it, that they get on?

Two years – three – four years [Alf laughs after being corrected by his daughter, Deb – Alf and his brother were born two years and 10 months apart; his children, four years apart].

When you got back from the war, you were guaranteed your job back at ABC?

They created – that's what they did do – they created a job for me when I came back of Sporting Assistant to Arnold Ewens, and they made a Sporting Assistant in each state – Grade 1, the bottom of the range. I thought they could have done a bit better for a start, but they didn't. But do you want to go into the ABC story now?

If you want to, let's get started on it.

Right.

First off, describe what was your job, the Sporting Assistant, Grade 1.

Sporting Assistant, I started off doing sporting highlights three nights a week at 6 o'clock, and Saturday, I did work on Saturdays – I did the monitoring of the programs, sporting programs, keeping results in the back studio.

So let's talk about what sporting highlights – did you have to physically go out of the studio to get the information or - - -?

I used to get most of it out of the news.

Right, so you just used what was there.

Like a lot of people did – they got it out of the news. It's no good pulling punches.

So what sort of sports were you covering?

All sports.

All sports.

Over the years I covered over 20 sports.

How did you get your head around 20 sports?

Well, whatever sport was on, Arnold Ewens and I had to do it. We worked it together.

So he was your mentor?

He was my boss – Sporting Supervisor. They talk about me failing my Intermediate. Arnold Ewens left school when he was 13, never did the Intermediate. He was the Sporting Supervisor, but he got in early – one of the early ones when it first formed. He was an office boy for nine years. He was broadcasting test cricket when he was 21, and he was still office boy. In those days the ABC was just beginning, it was an adventure. We all just worked like hell to put a program on: the record department and all the different programs, they're all gone now.

How many people would have been around the ABC then – I mean it was, as you said, a brand new body, wasn't it?

Very very few, very few. We all just pitched in like a family; we just worked our guts out. James Darling, the chairman, when I saw him in 1963 I was very discontented and he came to Adelaide and I phoned him at the South Australian Hotel where he was staying. He came over here for a board meeting (he was Chairman of the ABC) and I saw him for two hours at the South Australian Hotel, and we sat and we talked. At the finish of that, he was standing at the bottom of the staircase with his hand on the knob of the balustrade – he finished up calling me Alf, a dear old bloke – headmaster of one of the big colleges in England before he was at the ABC – nice guy. And he got that big knob at the bottom of the staircase: 'Alf, when you joined the ABC it was a great big adventure into a new field. Today the Australian Broadcasting Commission is a 30 million dollars paper machine – don't you forget it.' I said, 'Well that's what I'm here to talk about – it's all administration, that's what it is, and that's what's causing all the trouble.' And that's when he likened me to one of his star pupils, the great Paddy Finnegan, who was one of the inspirations for me joining the air force. He was killed, went down in the Channel and was drowned, about 20, 22 killed here. But I've seen photographs of him. He said 'You're the same type: you'll never give in will you?' I said, 'No, I won't.' And I didn't.

And you still haven't.

I still haven't. But it did my heart good to be compared with a bloke like Paddy Finnegan –

Let's talk about those early days.

– as a type. But it didn't do any good. I mean they got rid of Dr. Darling so, they got rid of the chairman.

OK, let's talk about those early days of the ABC when you were here at – particularly when you were training.

Well, Jay and I were married in 1947 and we went to Port Lincoln on our honeymoon and coming home I picked up a 'Radio Call', I think at Port Augusta, and 'Vic Richardson to broadcast football for the ABC' was the headline; and so my first broadcast ever outside broadcast descriptive work, apart from studio work reading results and that, was to broadcast football with Vic Richardson.

Not a bad start.

Well, it was tough – we went to the Norwood Oval. Jay came with me. Arnold was doing the trotting at night and he was also deputy race broadcaster. He was doing a lot, Arnold broadcast lots of sports – lovely voice, but sing-song, like a Grade 3 boy when he used to read out starters and riders at the trots. [Alf demonstrates with repetitive inflections]: Number one, number two, number three, number four, number five, number – dreary, uninteresting – no guts in it. Anyway, Arnold said, 'You do the first quarter.' I'd never broadcast in my life.

Other than – you'd done some studio broadcasts?

Only studio broadcasts, yeah but never descriptive work –

But that was basically just reading out results and things.

– We were up in the grandstand at Norwood Oval and I was sitting next to Vic and Jay was the other side of me, and so I did the first quarter. I thought I went fairly well. I knew my players backwards which I always knew, all the players. Vic Richardson took over and he hadn't been going long and he said, 'Oh a beautiful punt kick's come from about 50 yards and been marked by – ' and he hit me in the – so-and-so. All the way through the afternoon – he doesn't know his players properly. I finished up with black, all black there [on the arm] from Vic Richardson. You felt like saying – he's getting paid good money and I'm being paid Grade 1 Sporting Assistant, peanuts. Vic Richardson, he was a good bloke in many ways but I wouldn't put him in the same category as Alan McGilvray and Arthur Gilligan – the great

great broadcasting team. Vic was always a bit up himself. I know he was a great all-rounder – he's probably the greatest all-rounder, it has been written, and he was a great all-rounder, but to me he had that little touch of arrogance that I don't admire in people. Keith Miller was Keith Miller, ordinary, easy come-and-go: 'Gooday Freddie, how ya goin'?' Vic was always sort of nose in the air.

How did you feel after that first quarter of football, your first live commentary?

It was a big thrill actually, was a big thrill. I thought I went pretty well for a start.

What did the ABC say? Did they give you any - - -.

They kept me going at it. I went and did it for years, because Arnold and I were the – Vic didn't last long, he went to 5AD – so Arnold Ewens and I did the footy for - - -. We were rated up with Bill Davies and Tom Warhurst.

The top ones.

The best – I think they were better.

Why were they better?

I think Bill Davies was one of the greatest - - -.

He was outstanding.

As a manager, as everything. I got on well with Bill Davies at Channel 9 with the *Telethon Appeals*. But he was down-to-earth. You know, he ends up with a broom sweeping the floor at one stage there. He was one of those blokes with a bloody big voice, Bill Davies, ex-copper.

But he had a very sound reputation, well, particularly with Channel 9, didn't he, and was very very well-liked?

He was a bloody good manager, he was a top man, Bill Davies, and Tom Warhurst, a great footballer, tennis player, State tennis player – a lovely guy, Tom. They were a great couple. I think they were a better team. Arnold was a bit sing-songey. There's much more life, I think, in their broadcasts than ours. I was always lively but Arnold was not a lively person – he was solid - - -.

How many years did the two of you commentate for?

1947 till 1958.

A good long time.

That's when I took over racing completely. I was deputy race broadcaster from 1952 to '58 with Jack Havey.

Let's talk about some of those football years – the '47 to '58. Did you have a favourite team? Did you barrack for a team?

No I didn't, no I didn't. I was born in Norwood but I always admired the spirit of Port Adelaide – a lot of people don't but I admired the way they – they were a tough team, but it was just the spirit. A little mate of mine, Peter Neall, a cerebral palsy sufferer, he's now in his 60, well in his 60s. I've known him since he was 14, but he lives not far from the football club down there. I used to go with him; they made him a life member of the B Grade – a terrific little bloke with a marvellous memory but a crippled body. I'm a very close friend of Peter's, and Helen, his wife. He married her about six years ago, a lovely woman. But the spirit – Fos Williams, I still think, Foster Williams was one of the great inspiring players as against blokes like Jack Oatey of Norwood. Jack was a – they were different types of people. Williams was a pretty good operator with Telecom; he's a ball-getter – but there's something about Fos I just took to. He's a great leader.

Which he went to show further on in his coaching career, didn't he?

Oh yes, yeah. They loved him down there, and his three boys, one of them was killed, of course. John Halbert is a chap I always admired, and John Marriott, Ian McKay.

Well I should state my allegiance here. I'm a North Adelaide barracker so you've just said the right name.

Brilliant footballer, Ian McKay, swing a game like that. He was full-back but he'd come in and he'd ruck sometimes when North Adelaide was in trouble and he'd come into the ruck and BANG – change the game. He'd thump the ball 50 yards. Not a big man, but a terrific bloke. I used to have a few drinks with him at the Buckingham Arms, with an old school mate of mine. He was a good bloke, Ken [sic]. But then you've got the champions like Bobby Quinn, there's the best stab pass I've ever seen; not far behind him is Jimmy Deane and Bob Hank. I love those stab passes, it's gone out of footy now.

It's a very different game, football today.

I love the old game where there was open play, man to man. They're running around – rugby, basketball now. It's where you're getting scrums, too much handball, handball, handball. In the old days they used to play the set positions; they had the long kicking and

stab kicking; drop kicking was beautiful. It was an open game. I saw Aborigines play a similar game not so long ago up in Darwin, two Aborigine teams. That's how they - - -.

They still play the old game.

Yep, it's so lovely to watch, it's open, and man to man competition. Now it's all knock the other bloke out.

I lost interest in the game when it became fully professional. I think it lost something then when they started playing for money, instead of love of the game. Is that something you've found?

Betting is your big danger now, TAB. Betting is ruining everything, because who knows who's trying and who's not. I mean, it's so easy. You can all win.

Well, we've seen it in cricket, haven't we?

You can all decide to back one team and what are you going to do? You're not sure who's going.

In those ten years or so that you were commentating football, talk me through a typical day. How did you start, did you go to the studio first or straight to the ground?

Straight to the ground.

Right. Did you do the reserves as well?

Yes and the senior colts.

So you'd commentate all three games.

No, we'd go and watch.

You'd be there for the under 17s, OK.

Only the main game.

So what would happen when you got to the ground? Did you have a routine or a set practice each week?

No, we just sat there – watched the prelim games. Half time they used to have, the Adelaide Harriers used to run a mile race, which they should still do.

How long did that go on for? In my time at football, the mini-league was on at half time.

At Adelaide Oval they always had the mile – the Adelaide Harriers used to do the mile run.

OK, I wasn't aware of that.

They could do that still – entertain the crowd and give the athletes a chance before a big crowd. They don't do it anymore, but I think the senior colts as a prelim game is a better game than the reserves, because you've got lads under 19, young blokes and all the school kids would go. I still think they're wrong, when they changed that. Nobody wants to go and watch B Grade men but they will go and watch A Grade juniors.

Yeah, good point.

But they don't want to listen. If you're B Grade, you're B Grade – you don't get on the Adelaide Oval.

How did you prepare for a game?

I used to swat up at night, I used to learn my numbers, always got the *Budget* on the Friday and make sure you've got the numbers right. But mainly you'd get to know the players. They've all got different styles, different hair-dos; some have got their socks down. You gradually pick up things that distinguish one from the other; same with jockeys – they've all got different styles. It gets progressively easier the more you do. It's like anything in life, the more you do the easier it gets. But you have to know your work, you have to study. Like with racehorses, I used to paint the colours and put them all out on the floor. Say there are 120 horses on the day.

So you'd learn the colours.

I'd paint them all. Windy Hill-Smith might have five horses racing during the day in light blue and red hoops and cap. I'd put them in each race.

I guess in a similar way that's what you did with the footballers; it wasn't just learning their numbers, it was learning how they looked and how they played and - - -.

Mind pictures.

What about the umpires, did you ever have anything to do with them?

No.

Nothing at all.

No, very little. In fact they used to encourage us not to say anything about umpires. The football league was pretty strict on that. I agree, you can't criticise an umpire, he's there to do a job. If he's a cheat, he's a cheat – I've seen it happen.

But a lot of the coaches now constantly criticise the umpires, don't they?

Yes they do, they do, but it doesn't help the game. Umpire – it's like the judge of a court, he's not always right but he has to make a judgement. That's been proven right down through the years. I mean, innocent people have been hanged, but not many.

After the game, would you socialise in the bar with the players?

Very seldom.

Why was that?

I had to go back and do sporting highlights.

So you had to go back to the studio?

Back to the studio and do radio round-up and then later on, a television program.

I might just stop there because I'd like to talk in a bit more detail about the studio work and then moving into TV. So we might stop that tape there, there's only a few minutes left anyway. You happy with that?

Yeah, I'm happy.

DISC 3 recorded on 7 May 2012

Just before we broke for lunch, Alf, you were telling me about the work you were doing in commentating in football for a long period of time, for a bit over ten years. What were some of the highlights during that football time? Were there particular games or grand finals that stood out in your mind?

Always the interstate matches were interesting: Victoria and South Australia. They used to have the carnivals too, of all states.

We haven't had them for a long time have we, the carnivals? They only do it at junior levels now I think, don't they?

This was all the top interstate teams all came around: Tasmania, Western Australia (not Queensland or New South Wales), Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia. They were big carnivals. I go back to the '30s as a boy and there were some great footballers in Ken Farmer's years and record goal seasons. Norwood had a top bloke: Bruce Schultz – used to run second to him year after year.

What, to Ken Farmer?

Yeah.

What were the differences in commentating between the different grounds? Did you have a favourite ground to commentate from?

No they were all in the open stands. We were sitting up amongst the crowd at the back of the stands, usually up near the press – the press boxes, always a lot of noise around you – kids screaming out and – but we had our ear phones on so we didn't hear very much.

So it blocked out most of it while you were commentating?

That's right.

When the two of you were commentating, did you do a quarter each or did you both talk together?

Arnold – no we developed, Les and Bill Morris started a quick change. The idea was as soon as there was a ball out of bounds, you take over; or a scrum and the umpire called a free kick, you take over. As soon as there's a break in the footy, there's a quick change.

Did you prefer that to doing a whole quarter without a break?

Yes, the whole game, you just took over whenever there was a break. The thing was to hand the microphone to the other bloke – it kept the two voices going – much better. They all did it in the long run. It became the only way to do it, and it still is.

To me, visiting all the grounds over the years that I went to football, even though I was a North Adelaide person, I just loved Adelaide Oval.

Well it's a ground with such a beautiful oval.

Did you find that, that it was just such a beautiful place?

The Adelaide Oval to me, what they're doing now is a bloody shame. There's an old saying called, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' Every commentator who came to this country used to talk about the beautiful Adelaide Oval. Now it's going to be a concrete jungle and it'll

finish up like Glenelg – concrete, concrete, concrete, concrete, concrete, concrete all round the town. It's stupid: it was a lovely oval and thousands, over 50,000 people used to go there for the big games: cricket or footy. People get out in the wind and the rain – it's all part of living in Australia. To me, they're just going to ruin that whole place – why, I don't know.

You won't get an argument from me. I'm agreeing with you 100% on that.

To me, it's a disgrace. It is a glorious ground to go to.

I find it very sad when I go past now and see what's happened to it.

It's like Victoria Park racecourse: now it's a mess. It's got bloody caravans and trucks and - - .

Actually, it's a bit out of context but let's talk about Victoria Park, because you would have called races – actually, let's go back to the beginning of how you started your career in race calling. So you were at the ABC and while you were calling football, were you doing other sports as well?

Yes, tennis – the big tennis tournaments I did, usually with John Mahaffey.

At Memorial Drive with the - - - .

Yes, Len Schwartz and Ken Berriman. Ken Berriman was an umpire, but he was a very good broadcaster – he did all the summaries.

So you've had a lifelong ability as a tennis player and that passion for playing, so that must have been, from that point of view, I'm guessing that was easy for you to call, was it?

Oh yeah, I loved calling tennis. My boss used to say when I started, when he asked me to do races, he said, 'I like your tennis, not mad on your cricket.' I said, 'I can't stand broadcasting cricket – it's too slow.' I never could stand broadcasting cricket.

So you would have been calling the tennis games when Australia was at its peak.

Absolutely, absolutely. The Sedgman era – but with tennis I go way back to a little boy at Tranmere when the great team John Bromwich, Jack Crawford, Adrian Quist, Viv McGrath, Len Schwartz: they used to practise at the Tranmere. Tranmere had a couple of beautiful courts and I used to stick my nose through the wire fence and watch those blokes practise. I had a hit-up with Bromwich one day –

Just as a young boy?

– and it was tennis crazy around there because – I told you about Tranmere House where my Uncle Alf lived. Mr Milton and his two girls lived there: Joan and Molly Milton – Joan was a Milton Cup player, and they had a hard court alongside Tranmere House. I played a lot of tennis with Joan as a little boy. She was a couple of years older than me. She was a very good player. I had a little hit-up with John Bromwich there – great player, should have won Wimbledon. It was a sad day when Bob Falkenburg beat him. The ABC cut the broadcast: it was two sets all, Bromwich was leading 5–3 and it was 40–0, and they cut the broadcast. The next thing is, a flash came through, Falkenburg got up and beat him. I’ll never forget that.

When did you start calling tennis?

1949.

Who were some of the greats that you were calling then?

Sedgman, Mervyn Rose, Lew Hoad, Ken Rosewall.

Another great that never won Wimbledon, Rosewall.

Harry Hopman was the coach. I always got on well with Harry and Nell Hopman, his wife. They were a great couple. Harry Hopman was a great man, should have been knighted. That’s one bloke they missed out on. He was the Don Bradman of tennis.

Were all the games at the Drive?

Yes.

And again, you would have known all the people, you would have known the game inside out, so - - -.

Absolutely.

What did you have to do to prepare to call a game of tennis with that sort of knowledge that you already had?

You just call it as you see it, that’s all – it’s a ball by ball job. I remember the, I wasn’t broadcasting at the time, when Don Budge beat Bromwich in three sets. I think it was 6–2, 6–3, 6–1. And Don Budge, about 1936 – I was a boy – Don Budge had this magnificent backhand, he’d lift his shoulder and bang – roll his shoulder, and down the line – magnificent best backhand I’ve ever seen. There’ll never be another Don Budge backhand. I remember saying – I think I was sitting with Ken Berriman as a matter of fact. I said, ‘I wish Bromwich would watch his shoulder.’ Bromwich would come into the net and Budge would, as soon as he lifted that shoulder, it can’t come across court; you’ve got to drop your shoulder

to cut across court. Once it's there [Alf demonstrates], it had to go down there. I said, 'If he'd only watch his shoulder, he'd pick it every time.' I'd have been right on top of that shot, I'd have probably volleyed it for a winner.

Who was the best tennis player you ever saw, of all time?

Rod Laver – oh, I don't know. Lew Hoad – God he was a great little bloke, not a little bloke, he was a big strong lad.

What about the best woman player?

Navratilova. I hate the way they call it [pronounce] Navratilova. Navra-ti-lova.

I still think she's the best I've ever seen too. She was so far ahead, wasn't she?

I think so – she was a killer. Steffi Graf was great.

What do you think of modern tennis now?

It's not quite as – we haven't got the team we used to have but I think we miss Hopman. Pat Rafter's doing fairly well, and John Fitzgerald. Neale Fraser was a bit of a pain to me when he was captain. I think that's when it went down. There's something about Fraser – he was a left-hander, you know, a great kicking serve to the backhand – it won him a lot of games and he's a good doubles player. But to me, it's – Hopman was like Bradman: he was the boss. If you didn't do what he said, he put a lot of blokes in the right way – you want to play for Australia, you do the right thing. You don't muck around with Hopman. He set by example – he was a very fit man himself – he was a squash champion. A lot of people didn't like Hopman. I like chaps – that's what I liked about Bradman – he was a down-to-earth bloke but if you want to get in to the Australian team, do the right thing. Miller was one bloke who got away with murder, but he could because he was a champion. Like Dawn Fraser: she's a champion.

When did you meet Dawn? You knew her as a youngster, didn't you?

She came over here when she was 16 and swam – won about five titles in the one night, and Harry Gallagher afterwards, he asked me – they went to a party down at Croydon, and Harry asked me, 'Will you take Dawn down and look after her, because the boys will be after her, and she'll want to have a relax?' And sure enough, she had a couple of beers and was in the corner of the floor like a drunken idiot, and the boys, you know, hanging around her. She was a lovely girl, Dawn Fraser.

You got to know her well over the years?

Yes, I used her for a Labor ad years ago in the federal election. Chris Hurford talked me into doing a big full-page ad for all the papers throughout Australia. I had a big picture of Dawn Fraser: 'Champions Champion Champions' was the heading of it. And Don Dunstan, I was pretty good friends with Don.

Tell me about your friendship with Don.

He was a friend of – I met him through a chap named Kevin Winn who had a property with his wife, Beverley, up at Coromandel Valley, and an apple orchard, and he stood the great Comic Court, stood him at stud towards the end of his career. And Kevin is one of these dry old blokes, wiry fit bloke – a terrific bloke, and Beverley. We hit it off like that [Alf clicks his fingers]. He's still a great mate. I went to Queensland with him for eight weeks to help him build an A-frame up there – he's up there now. Kevin turned out to be Don Dunstan's private accountant, which I never knew. I never knew anything about it, and you wouldn't think so – old Kevin with his 'Gooday Alf, 'ow ya goin?' A real Aussie voice, ya know, 'Gooday mate.' He's still swearing, 'Yes, you bastard.' He rings me occasionally.

Anyway, it was when they were talking about legalising homosexuality which I won't have a bar of – that's when I first met Don Dunstan. I told Kevin I'd just like to tell Dunstan he's doing the wrong thing. He said, 'Well, do you want to?' I said, 'Yeah.' So he took me up to his office in Victoria Square and he just sat back in his chair, 'What's your trouble, Alf?' I said, 'Don, legalising homosexuality,' I said, 'it's not on.' I said, 'It's bad enough now, illegal; but it's something, you can't make it legal, and prostitution is illegal.' I said, 'There's a lot of homosexuals in the ABC – I have to work with them, but I just say I don't want to be seen with you over at the Walker's Arms – you race on your own if that's what you want to play, I don't want to be seen with you.'

What did Don say?

He sat back – he didn't do anything about it but he accepted it. I said, 'A bloke like me, and I go into the Walker's Arms Hotel – a bloke comes up and propositions me and I can't do anything about it because you've legalised it. A woman comes up to me propositioning and you can arrest her for soliciting. Why? One is normal and one is not.' And I said, 'I just feel very strongly about it. Leave it as it is, don't legalise it. Legalise prostitution, because it's the oldest trade in the bloody world, but not, not homosexuality.' He used to come down here occasionally.

So you became friends with Don after that?

He knew Mum [Alf's wife, Jay] through Keith Michell. Keith's a great mate of his – they did *Walk up the Avenue* at the theatre – did it fairly well, Don strutting around the stage.

What did you think of Don Dunstan?

I liked him.

Did a lot for the state, didn't he?

I just liked the guy. I think he meant well. I don't know what he did wrong, except legalise homosexuality. I think that's opened the world for disaster. Gay marriage, I mean, marriage is for a man and woman for God's sake.

Well, we could go on about that for a long time and we'll probably disagree on that - - -.

I'm happy with you disagreeing.

No, that's fine. I'd like to go back to the various sports that you were calling, because you had a long career calling football; tennis you sound as though you called that for a long time. What was the best game of tennis that you ever called? Is there one that really stands out for you?

I think Bromwich/Budge. Oh, Sedgman – Sedgman: I always loved the way he played tennis; Pat Rafter – that's the one Jay reckoned I was like.

Which one was that – Rafter?

Yeah, Mum, Jay said she fell in love with me on the tennis court.

Yeah?

She said, 'You were very like Pat Rafter – the game you played' – big serve/volley.

And I think the one that sticks in my mind was the year that Rafter won Wimbledon.

Oh, but there've been some great matches: Borg and John McEnroe. I was at the Glenelg Footy Club for that. It went on till about half past four in the morning – it was a great match. When you come to Wimbledon, they're all great matches. Today we've got Federer, a polished player; Sampras is one of my favourites, and Pancho Gonzales earlier. But there've been some great players –

And you would have known a lot of those players personally too, wouldn't you?

– Boris Becker when he was 16 – I tipped him to win it halfway through the tournament. I said, 'This boy will win it on his service'. He had a murderous serve, Boris Becker. And he won it. I usually go close to picking the winner. I think this young Tomic - - -.

Has he got a good future?

I think he'll get there if he gets his brain right.

That's the only problem at the moment – he's got the game, hasn't he?

I've seen him play some great tennis – it's there. It's the pressure – see that's the game, pressure. It's like lawn bowls. You've got four bowls. It's the last bowl that counts – it's the pressure bowl, when it's all set up; you can see a shot and you can make the difference between winning and losing in just one bowl. And it's where you come down to a word called intensity, which is a big big word in everything in life. While you've got your intensity, you're winning. As soon as that intensity goes, you can feel it give way. You know you're on the skids. It's intensity, once you've got that.

So was that your strength – the way you handled that pressure?

You save it up. I mean, with bowls – I'm very proud of the chap – I beat the second best player ever in Australia in Australian championships – I'd only been playing six months: John Dobbie, in Melbourne. Again, a challenge – sectional play in Melbourne. My friend, Eric Smart – a great tenor he was, top tenor, Eric Smart – state skipper at bowls – he talked me into playing bowls after the court case in 1986. I practised and I bought an old set of bowls and I bought – borrowed a twin set. I was practising with eight bowls, and they called me morning, noon and night. I used to get out and draw bowl, and draw bowl and draw bowl at Holdfast Bay, and I picked it up very quickly.

After about nine months I entered for the Australian Championship in Melbourne and they all thought I was crazy. So, when the draw came out, I had this great John Dobbie – had to beat him in the third game: in the first game I was leading 14-6 and a chap started kicking bowls behind me, just at the point of delivery. I had a hell of big blue with him and I lost the match. Second one, I got beaten 21-20 by a chap who won the section. By this time I'm red hot, I'm red hot – the first bloke, I was killing him until he started gamesmanship. So, I went and had lunch and came out and beat the great John Dobbie – rated second to Glyn Bosisto. Glyn Bosisto won four titles in Australia in a line: '49, '50, '52 and '53 – they didn't play in '51 – four Australian championships. So, he's rated in *Miller's Guide*, second best player ever.

Eric Smart said, 'Well, you're going to play the great John Dobbie.' I was 65 and John was a couple of years older than me, and I was – I had a rum for lunch to calm me down – it made me a bit hot, I had one rum. Went out and told him, 'Regards from Eric Smart,' and away we went. I beat him 21-14. Eric couldn't believe it. He said, - - -.

And you'd only been playing for 9 months.

Yeah, about nine months, and he said, Eric said, 'If you get six or eight off him, you can be proud of yourself for the rest of your life. After the match, we went separate ways. I phoned him after tea and he said, 'How did you go?' I told him about the bloke kicking bowls. He said, 'I told you, you're too easy to upset. People will do it to you.' I said, 'All right Eric'. Then he said, 'How many did you get off Dobbie?' 'Well,' I said, 'have a guess.' He said, 'Oh, three, four, five.' I said, 'I beat him Eric.' He said, 'You didn't – what size?' I said, '21-14'. And he said, 'You're a very gifted draw bowler.' That's all he said to me.

And that was at 65 when you started.

So that's what happens when I'm talking about intensity. By the time I got to John Dobbie, I was on fire and every bowl I put down to him - - -.

And you could feel that in your body, that you were there.

I could feel it there, I could feel the intensity there – and it's all in the feel.

And were you like that with all the sports that you played – you could feel that intensity and that pressure?

Intensity, see, everything's intensity – every smash would intensify – everything –

And that's what makes a good player.

– Big serve and BAM - - -.

Had you ever considered playing a sport as a profession, as a career, because you had the talent?

Tennis would have been the one. They wanted me to go on with boxing but I'm not a fighter really. I like boxing but when Tiperon knocked me out, I thought, this is not my game. I mean he was – there's a big difference between boxing and fighting. I'd rather of taken on a sport like fencing, something with - - -.

But it sounds as though you were good at whatever sport you put your mind to.

Well I was. Yes, whatever I did, I played a pretty good game, being first up, yes. I was just natural.

Do you think that added to your ability to be a good commentator, because you understood what playing with intensity was?

Exactly, exactly. I know what's required, I know the feeling. I can see it when they walk on the court – can see it in the movement. A little story: Peter Walsh interviewed me a couple of weeks ago, and he said, 'Where did you get your intensity from to call races?' I said, 'That's an interest in passion and intensity.' I said, 'It all happened when I was a little boy playing cricket of all things. I always had a good eye and I used to open the batting for Pulteney if there was a bye with tennis, and we were playing a game – I reckon I was about 12 years old and playing in a paddock at Magill – two teams of kids – and I was batting. I was 150 – it was the Bradman era – Bradman was '33, '34. I wanted to be like Don Bradman with the bat so I got this little bat I had and I'm 150 not out, and I wanted to make 200, and Dean Delaney – we never got on very well, he was captain of the side, and his mate was the umpire. When I got to 150 I bent down and picked up the ball and threw it to the wicket keeper, and Dean Delaney went, 'How's that?' I said – appealed to the umpire: 'Out, interference with the ball.' That is a rule of cricket – it's very seldom ever done. From that day with Delaney, I said, 'If I ever fight with you, I'll kill you.' He cheated me out. I would have got 400 that day.

Obviously cheated. You just mentioned Bradman which reminds of a story you were telling me: when you were about eight, Bradman was in a play called - - -.

It Ain't Cricket.

Yeah, tell me a little bit about that.

Well, it was written by the cartoonist for the *Adelaide News*, Kerwin Maegraith, he wrote the play. It was a farcical thing written around the bodyline series – and he had all the characters right back from Antony and Cleopatra right up to Larwood – all these different characters: Hitler, Mussolini – it was a musical comedy. My father produced it at the *Theatre Royal*; mother did all the accompanying of the songs and I was helping Dad behind stage. It was a packed house and patronised by the government – by the Governor, and all the Australian and English cricketers were at the show. It was at one of the rehearsals and I was just standing on the wings and Bradman came and just ruffled my hair and said, 'How you going, sonny?' From that day, I never touched my hair for about six weeks. He was just the same when Debbie met him about 10 years ago at the Adelaide Oval. I took Deb up, for him to sign – autograph some books. He came through the door, 'Goodday, Alf.' I said, 'Sir Don, how are you – my daughter Deb - - -.' He was just like a boy – just the same man, down to earth. You

ought to read his book, *The Private Don*, written by Christine Wallace, published in 2001. It's a lovely book: *The Private Don* – from a lot of his personal letters. He was a great friend of Rohan Rivett. Bradman was advising Rivett on the Stock Exchange and Rivett was advising Bradman on other things. It's a good book – all the private letters, a lovely book to read.

Was he the best you ever saw, as a batsman?

Oh, there's no other. There's no other.

No-one even close.

No, no other. He had 100 per cent concentration and intensity – it's what I'm talking about. He never lost it. I once asked him, I said, 'What is your mind on?' He said, 'I just watch the ball, that's all.' He said, 'I don't worry about the scoreboard, never look at the scoreboard.' He said, 'I just watch the ball wherever it goes.' He'd trained himself. That's the key to a ball game: watch the ball – it's concentration. Once you start wandering – that's what you've got to do, play the ball – like footy, go for the ball. There's too much playing the man today.

And it's interesting – when we were talking about music – his granddaughter is a beautiful singer.

She is.

I was fortunate to attend one of her concerts, and again we've got that sport and music connection. She's got a lovely voice.

It's a lovely velvety voice, a beautiful voice – a lovely girl. I've never met her but - - -.

I didn't meet her. I just was fortunate that I saw her at a Town Hall concert – very very impressive.

And I got to know Bradman because I used to go and play cricket at Ashford House occasionally. He was always there; Shirley was there, his daughter. Peter Neall was there, my little mate. There were a couple of concerts I sang down there when Mum came and played for me. My brother painted his portrait.

Your brother is an artist.

Yeah, a portrait painter. He was in Perth, yes – he died a couple of years ago.

Where's the portrait that he did?

It's at the WACA – WACA members' bar. But he's got a portrait in Washington Gallery, New York – a painting, Lights of Perth, when Major Glenn went over Perth.

You love the game of cricket, but you said you never commentated on it.

Yes I did.

Oh, you did?

Yes, but I never enjoyed playing – I just – cricket to me – any game that takes three or four days to play is not worth playing. I'd rather play baseball – there's a lot of action in baseball but the trouble is they don't cover it the right way on television: you want a wide shot; you don't have to have big close-ups but you want to see the play. They have too many close-ups of the pitcher winding up and the batsman. The game of baseball, you've got to watch them try to steal bases and where the fieldsmen are moving around. They can be like ants, but you know who they are, but you watch the game.

Whereas the TV game is very much close-ups, isn't it?

All close-ups, close-ups: dancing, singing – these torso shots of dancers, I mean a dancer, the feet are the big thing, the whole body – but they cut, cut, cut – close-up, close-up. I think, turn it off. I want to watch the bastard dance, not you punching buttons about every second. Have you ever counted the number of times they cut in a minute. People don't understand: it takes a tenth of a second for the eye to focus from one thing to the other, and these camera shots are going click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click – you don't really see what's going on.

How many sports have you commentated on?

Twenty.

List some of them that we haven't mentioned already.

It's been mentioned many times in the past.

That's a lot.

The only chap that's broadcast more is George Grljusich in Perth. I think he did 22.

The 20 that you did, were they all for the ABC?

Yeah, yeah.

So, what other sports did you do? You've got football, cricket, tennis, table tennis - - -.

Golf, boxing, wrestling, swimming, hockey, lacrosse, rugby – any sport – golf.*

And you were good at all of them!

Some of them, there wasn't a lot of work to do – like golf, you're not talking; you're filling in with golf a lot. The thing is to be able to say something. That's the key to it all – to be able to talk. I was always gifted that way.

Now you commentated in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. What sports did you do for that one?

Actually I was engaged to do the boxing. I did it all here – went down and covered all the qualifying fights here and did recordings, and they all thought I was pretty good. So I went to Melbourne and I was supposed to just go over, I thought, for a couple of weeks but they sent me over early. I was there nine weeks, in Melbourne, for the games, all told, and they put me on *Radio Australia*. Ray McDonald – they just double-crossed me: they got me to Melbourne. I said, 'I'm doing the boxing; I want to go around to all the different teams and have a look at these boxers before the games.' No, I had to do a report to the BBC every night.

Why was that? Why weren't you on ABC? Why did they send you to that?

They sent me over to do the boxing but when I got there Ray McDonald had moved over to go into television production – so he moved out of *Radio Australia*, so they shoved me in. So I did that for nine weeks, those broadcasts.

Was that a good experience?

I had to slow right down. I had to come back to my old RAF accent.

You had to have the British accent. (laughter)

I did. I had to slow right down: 'Good evening ladies and gentlemen, this is the Orstralian Broadcasting Commission from Melbourne.' I put an RAF accent in that I had when I came home. I remember when I got off the train at Keswick – Mum and Dad said, 'Welcome home boy, welcome home – how are ya?' I said 'Hello mother, hello father,' [Alf laughs] and I thought, what have I come home to? It's amazing how it all rubbed off.

* Note from Deb Gard: Other sports which Alf definitely broadcasted: cycling, rowing, snooker, trotting, horse-racing. Remaining possibilities include: soccer, basketball, softball, athletics, diving.

Well you'd been away quite a while hadn't you?

Allan Crabb kept it up. Allan Crabb, he was a good mate of mine.

Well they liked you to sound as though you were British when you were commentating, didn't they?

Yeah, but you couldn't do it with race broadcasting.

We've only probably got 10 minutes left, so I'd like to talk about those Olympic Games. So what did you call for *Radio Australia*?

Cycling. I did the road cycling on the pub corner and then I did results – that's all I did. They took me off the boxing because I fell out with Clive Arbou [?].

But cycling would have been an exciting event to have called.

Ohh, well they went past pretty quickly.

Did you know a lot about cycling?

No – no, they just shoved me in there to do something.

But you would have been heard in Britain?

Oh yes, yeah. But *Radio Australia*, I had a lot of good comments about that – they wanted me to stay there. They wanted me to take it over.

Did you consider it?

No, I was all primed up to take over race broadcasting, which I did do.

We'll talk about that tomorrow. What was the nine week experience in Melbourne like?

It was a wonderful time. I had some great times.

So, you wouldn't have been commentating all the time. What did you get to do in the other time?

Office work and putting the program together for the BBC – result service – just collating results and broadcasting them to London.

Did you get to see any other events from other sports?

I got to the stadium a couple of times, that's all. I saw Vladimir Kuts win the 5000 and the 10,000 – that's the greatest performance I've seen. He went further and further and further ahead every lap. The Russians were over on the far side – every time he went past he surged another 10 yards in front: won by about 100 yards.

Get to see any of the swimming?

Yes.

Did you see Dawn?

Yes, I'd never miss Dawn. But it was all on television; I saw it all on television anyway, in the studio.

Dawn is an icon in Australian sport but she's also seen as the bad girl – and she's not a bad girl, is she? Would you like to tell me about Dawn, because she's not what the public really sees.

Dawn Fraser used to just take up any challenge, like when she took the flag up in Japan. She had her story on *This Is Your Life*. They flew somebody up representing the Emperor – there was never a complaint from Japan. It was just a prank. Somebody said, 'You wouldn't be game to take the flag down,' and she did. And the stupid manageress had her disqualified for 10 bloody years – end of Dawn Fraser. She used to hang around Norwood Parade with a bunch of blokes; she was a fun girl and a bloody champion. I won't have a word said against Dawn.

There's so many champions in Australia who have come undone a bit because of the bureaucracy of sport. Dawn's probably the best example of that, because as you just said, no-one in Japan had a problem with what she did.

No.

It was the Australian bureaucrats that finished her.

In *This Is Your Life* they flew her out here to represent Japan – no complaint from them at all. It was just the bloody manageress.

That happens quite a lot in boxing too – the top bureaucrats in boxing seem to spoil it for a lot of the boxers. We often hear examples of that.

It's a funny game, boxing: professional boxing is a racket – big betting runs the game. Mohammad Ali, to me - - -.

Did you ever see him box?

Only on film.

What did you think of him?

Marvellous, marvellous.

Did you see that recent show on, I think it was SBS, on his last big fight – the rumble in the jungle one?

Yeah.

That was very good and that gave you a bit of an insight as to what he was like.

Yeah, but he was nothing like he used – the younger one: Cassius Clay years. I think he's the best, the best. But there've been some great fighters: Joe Louis - - -.

Australia's had some very good fighters, haven't we, world champions?

Well, Dave Sands to me, is probably our greatest. He got killed in a trucking accident when he was a young bloke. I interviewed Dave on radio years ago. He had a handshake, you'd think it was like a piece of velvet, just soft.

Very gentle.

Yes, just to look at him in street clothes, you'd think he was just an ordinary Aborigine, but we went down to watch him strip – he stripped off and did a work-out for us – he had a beautiful body on him. He held the middleweight, heavyweight and the light-heavyweight. He had three – and the British – he had four titles at one stage: middleweight, light-heavyweight and heavyweight and the middleweight British – all in the one year. He was a great, great fighter.

You've seen some incredible champions in your sporting life, haven't you?

Yes, they're still coming up though – they keep coming.

Who would be some of the people that you admire in today's sporting world – some of the current champions?

Roger Federer – I think he's a class act. It's hard to – I'll have a bit of a think about that.

Well I was thinking, particularly in the swimming: Thorpey and some of those swimmers.

Yeah, see, modern names don't come to me as well as the old timers –

You still actively follow sport?

– Kerwin, what’s his name, Kernan? [Kieren Perkins]. Modern names just don’t register like the old timers.

But you still have a strong interest in sport – you still watch sport?

Oh, I love it, but I still haven’t got Foxtel. I won’t have it on principle.

Should be free to air.

Of course it should, and it was going to be. John Howard said it would be.

That was the promise.

That was a bloody promise that they broke. They’ve chopped it all out – you hardly see anything now. They knock it out one by one. Once they get rid of one, that gives them a loophole: the next one drops out. They don’t do any golf, or cricket, or tennis – that’s why I say, modern – my mind going way back is a lot better than modern – I just can’t remember their names.

Has racing been your biggest passion in sport?

No, tennis.

Tennis is still the passion – but from a professional point of view, as a commentator, would race calling be your biggest?

No, I enjoyed tennis broadcasting.

Still tennis, yeah.

Racing was hard work.

I still don’t know how you did it.

I never made – it was never easy for me. I had to work hard at it. I used to sit here for hours at night and go over a call – I wouldn’t go to bed until I could call it – there were 120 sets of colours on that floor.

Where we’re sitting now?

Yeah, I wouldn't go to bed. I used to sit here and I'd have them all in a big square: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – and I'd call them all in as many seconds: 120 horses, 120 seconds – no umming and erring: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 ...

In some of the information that Deb's provided me with, there was an amazing article in *Woman's Day* – I've got it with me and I can show it to you later: and it said that you called so fast that you would get home before the horse –

That's right.

– One of your friends said – would that be true?

Yeah - - -.

And I think that's a perfect note where we'll stop today, because I'd like to talk tomorrow in a lot of detail about your racing career.

Well, I think I was probably – called more horses in a minute faster than others. I did call them very quickly, because I never had much padding. I just called horses.

And I think that's a perfect place for us to stop today with you calling horses.

DISC 4 recorded on 8 May 2012

Yesterday, Alf, we talked a lot about an amazing range of things that you did in your life and today I really want to concentrate on your work with the ABC, particularly as a racecaller. I was still staggered yesterday when you said that you'd actually called 20 sports and knew about it but I think probably what you're most famous for is your race calling.

Oh yes, yes.

So perhaps if you can just start to tell me how you got involved in race calling. Do you remember what your first race was and how that came about – that you called that?

It all happened when two commentators – Jack Havey was the ABC racecaster in Adelaide and Arnold Ewens, my boss, was his deputy. In 1952, I'd been deputy trotting broadcaster, and I'd done a couple of auditions for racing, but Arnold's wife, Elaine, died of TB. I didn't know until the day before that she was ill even. Arnold used to go home early for weeks and

weeks and weeks leading up to it and I was doing a lot of work, a lot of hard work, and over-time, and I never knew Arnold's wife was sick at all until this Friday night, we were getting ready to do *Sportsmen's Parade* and Arnold said, 'You'll have to do the trots tomorrow night Alf.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Well, Elaine will probably die tomorrow.' Now I drove him home and went into her bedroom and I stood at the bedhead and had a talk to Elaine and she said – she looked at me and said, 'Alf, whatever you do, spend your whole life at the ABC.' It was a shot at Arnold, and they were the last words she said to me – and she died.

Jack Havey, at the same time, had his first heart attack and he had a sympathectomy operation, severed nerves by the spine in his back. It was a pretty serious operation. In 1952, they're both out. So we took splits of 5AD's calls – Ted Madigan – and that went on for eight weeks, until one morning, Saturday morning, I was working my guts out trying to do three men's jobs at once, and Mr Wicks came up to the office and he said, 'Alf, we've got to do something about a race broadcaster.' He said, 'Do you know anybody?' I said, 'No, I don't.' At that time I didn't know anybody who could take it over. 'Well,' he said, 'I've been giving it a bit of a think about it.' He said, 'I like your tennis broadcasts, you're just on your own at that,' and he said, 'you've been doing trots, so would you like to give it a go?' I said, 'Well, I'd prefer not to,' but I was 31 at the time, I thought I was a bit old; racecasters start as kids – six years old, and take a recorder down to the races and spend 10 years on a tape recorder before they go and ask for a job at 16. Bill Collins started at 16 – and I'm 31, so.

Anyway, I decided I'd give it a go. So I took a tape recorder down for about five weeks and took it back to the boss's office every Monday morning and he listened to them and there was one horse there, I'll never forget, Gallant Hussar: it got stuck, I couldn't remember the damn thing's name. It was at Morphetville, and it was on the tape there, 'that bloody bastard of a horse' [Alf laughs]. Wicks said, 'You can't say that.' I said, 'You'd be surprised at what I can say, sir.' I said, 'It's just one of those names that won't stick.' Anyway, after about five weeks he decided to give me a go. That's how I started.

I was deputy to Jack Havey then; he came back. In 1954 he had a second breakdown – the year the Queen came out here. He came back – he had his operation – redid the operation and he was hosting everything to do with the Queen. He went to Broken Hill; I had to climb up bloody balustrades and things. He came back to do the races on the Thursday – Broken Hill was Wednesday – he came back on Thursday and he gave me a ring and said 'Come and pick up the [field] glasses, you'll have to do half the meeting tomorrow.' So I did – I did the first two races of fields of 20 and two-year-olds and Jack went to lunch with the Queen and that was a great day. And then he continued until 1957 – Port Cup Day was his last broadcast, and I took over on New Year's Day, 1958.

As chief caller?

As the chief caller, and I went right through to 1976.

What did it feel like when you called your first race?

Oh, nervous as hell. My first race: I used to speak quickly and I was a bit passive in my approach, you know, I came on the course broadcast and sort of 'Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, this is the Australian Broadcasting Commission, blah blah, lovely day, blah blah blah blah – in that sort of voice, a sort of matter of fact voice. Ike Treloar came up to my box – the first man to broadcast a race in 1924 – old Ike stumbled up to my box and he said, 'You went all right, son,' – he used to speak a bit in the head – 'You went all right, son,' and he said, 'just slow down a little bit, try and slow down a little bit; you're a little bit quick,' and he said, 'try and be a little bit more definite when you come out,' you know, instead of being passive. [Alf demonstrates a stronger speaking voice] : Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, this is the ABC from the Cheltenham racecourse – lift people up. So Jack Havey came up to my box and I gradually improved and I grew – it's like everything else, the more you do, the easier it gets, supposedly easier – you can never relax. You're on full alert all the time, you're full bore.

There's no such thing as an easy call, is there - - - ?

No, not even a two horse race.

Because you've got such limited time, haven't you?

Well, when you've got 20 horses to call in a five furlong race – I used to call them twice - - -.

How did you manage to do that?

I did talk quickly – I mean William Kay, the conductor of the ABC Orchestra in those days, he said, 'You know Alf, you speak twice as fast as anybody else, but I can understand every word you say.' And yet on another occasion when the American fleet was here, I went up to the committee room afterwards and the admiral of the fleet was there. I went up and was introduced to him and he said, 'You're the course broadcaster?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I don't doubt that you're a very fine racecaller but I never understood one word you said.'

Because you were talking Australian.

Yes [Alf laughs]. So there's your different opinions, you see.

You had a very long - - -.

I still talk quickly though - - -.

But you had a very long career as a racecaller. When did you realise that you were very good?

Never.

Even after 20 years?

Never. I don't think I was very good, I think I was average.

Well let me dispute that because every person that I've spoken to has said you were the best caller they've heard.

Yes, well, see it's a matter of opinion. I listen to other blokes: a chap like Joe Brown – Jack Havey was a very hard act to follow. Jack was a professional actor as a young man, boy, in Gilbert and Sullivan and he was a good all-rounder, Jack. He played – not state cricket – district cricket for, and baseball, for Prospect; and he was a very good compere – top class compere. Jack was always in command because he had the back-up of the ABC. Jack Havey was king. I was, as far as I'm concerned, I used to say – I got to a point where I had a talk to Clem Semmler about getting my re-grading from a sporting assistant to a sporting commentator/special duties, like Norman May and Bobby Richardson and Brian McLennan, doing specialist work. I wanted to be an ABC broadcaster – special duties. And Jack had – I always used to say that I was king of the racecourse and shit of the ABC. I used to tell everybody, because I never had a standing: I was a sporting assistant doing a top job. I did not get the billing. And even when the TAB started up, they brought a big sheet out, on big betting sheets with the Friday night show *They're Racing* with Malcolm McDonald and Alf Gard, underneath – and I went right up the wall. I said, 'Hang on a minute, I'm doing the show; he introduces me – that's all he does.' And the boss said, 'Well Alf, we don't want everybody to think it's your show.' I said, 'Well it is – I put it together, I do the calls, I do the show - - -.'

Because you had the show – wasn't it called the *Alf Gard Sports* - - -.

I just stated my case all the time to Bill White – but Bill White, we had an altercation at the Olympic Games – that was – it was the way he approached me, Bill White, at the time. We were at the Festival Hall, just before the Games started. There was a bunch of us: Ken Dakin and Keith Donald, Joy Twining, Mal [Noel] Bailey, Arnold Ewens, Bobby Richardson, Brian McLennan – we were all in a group and we were talking about tennis, and Ken Dakin reckoned he was pretty good at tennis and he said, 'I'll play you for \$100 any time you like, Alf, down at the Kooyong.' I said, 'You're on, Ken.' And Arnold stepped in, he said, 'I'll

double the bet, Ken.’ So the argument got a little bit uptight – and I would have killed Ken Dakin, he wouldn’t have seen which way the bloody ball went. But Bill White wandered across.

Bill White was the President of the Staff Association at the time, of the Australian Broadcasting Commission – bald-headed, tall bloke came across – he said, ‘Oh, you must be the great Alf Gard from Adelaide.’ I said, ‘Yes.’ I’d just been re-graded from Grade 1 to Grade 4, after all those years, and it was a nice rise but it should have been at specialist grading. So I said to Bill, ‘Are you satisfied now?’ I said, ‘No I’m not, not happy at all’. He said, ‘You’ll never bloody well be happy, will you?’ I said, ‘Go and get stuffed, you bald-headed bastard, piss off.’ That’s Bill White. We were just having a talk about tennis. So he came here as manager later on, in 1965, and that’s the man who destroyed me.

We’ll get to him. I want to talk a bit more about the racing. I read in one of the articles that when you were calling, when the horses got to the straight, that you put your glasses down – is that right? When you were calling a race, you’d have your binoculars but as soon as the horses got to the straight, you didn’t use them.

That was so I could see if a horse was making a move from the rear, because once they come into the straight, they’re all fore-shortened, with powerful field glasses. If you watch the Formula One on television, while the cars are side-on, they’re miles apart; coming towards you they’re all bunched up, and the cameras bring them right up together – that’s the trouble – so you don’t see if a horse is making a move. Jack Havey and Arnold Ewens, they both tipped me off, ‘Just drop your glasses and have a look over the top and see if a horse is moving, round near the last part of the turn.’ That’s how I used to pick them up. I’d be a furlong before Bert Day. I’d say, ‘Galilee - - - .’ The crowd would be on their feet and Bert still hadn’t seen it moving. He used to go so quickly, he had gears – the great champions have got gears.

Who were the great champions, the best horses, in the period that you were calling? Who were the best horses for you?

Well, Galilee - - -.

Galilee, way in front?

Galilee was certainly one of them – Light Fingers, one of the most courageous little mares of all of them. They talk about this Black Caviar, but Light Fingers was a little chestnut with a big heart and as a two-year-old she won – she ran second first up, down the straight five, Victoria Park. As a three-year-old, she won first up, down the straight five, and as a four-

year-old she came back and won first up – and yet in between she won the Melbourne Cup; she ran second in the Melbourne Cup; she won the Oaks; she won the Wakefield; she won all the staying races. The auditor from Sydney used to come down once a year, the federal auditor for the ABC. He used to come up to my broadcast box and, ‘What will win today, Alf?’ I’d put him on to Light Fingers in Sydney and she ran a shocker in a staying race, finished last. She came back and went for a spell; came back to Victoria Park and the auditor turned up at my box and I said, ‘You can put your pocket on Light Fingers in the first race.’ He said, ‘It’s only five furlongs.’ I said, ‘She’ll win, she’s done it before, she’ll do it again.’ ‘Oh, she couldn’t do it, Alf.’ Of course she bolted in – backed it in from about 10/1 to about 4/1 so he was on it at eights, a very happy man. I said, ‘She’s just got gears.’

Where did Tulloch sit in your - - -?

Oh, Tulloch, well Tulloch was an out-and-out champion. He won his big races by eight and ten lengths. It’s all in that book that I – little book with three photos.

Which I’m looking forward to reading, I must admit.

He won by eight lengths and ten lengths – the Caulfield Guineas, the Victoria Derby, the AJC Derby, the Caulfield Cup – he won them all by farther than Black Caviar is winning. She’s winning by six lengths, and he was just being held together.

Where does Black Caviar sit compared to the champions that you’ve just mentioned?

Fillies in the past – a horse called, mare called (?) back in the 1890s. She won the Stradbroke Handicap in Brisbane – the biggest sprint race – as a two-year-old. Wiggle won the Stradbroke as a three-year-old [sic: two-year-old] – a big top race in Queensland, big sprint race. And they won a lot of races, Wiggle and – and we had a little mare called Auraria in 1895: she ran third in the Victoria Derby and she won the Melbourne Cup and she won the Oaks on the Thursday – so Saturday, third in the Derby; won the Melbourne Cup on Tuesday; won the Oaks on Thursday and dead-heated with a great horse called Wallace, son of Carbine, in the C.B. Fisher Plate on the Saturday. We’ve got a race here called the Auraria Stakes, still, after all those years. We had a little horse – mare – here called Alinura who hardly ever gets a mention.

I’ve never heard of it.

She won the Victorian Oaks and the Wakefield Stakes and the South Australian Derby – and so that’s mares – my Lady Hideaway traces back to Alinura. That’s how I bought her, for \$600. But there’re so many great mares: Emancipation, More Joyous who is just winning in

Sydney; Atlantic Jewel; Miss Finland – Miss Finland, last – a couple of years ago won everything, won the Golden Slipper for Colin [sic: David] Hayes – she looked like winning, well, she won everything easily on a canter. It's not the first time but Black Caviar, I think, is winning more easily. I don't know what will happen when something challenges her, really.

Well maybe she'll find out when she goes to England.

I don't know, but she's got to get, be beaten one day.

Oh yes, of course.

We [South Australia] had a horse called Proud Miss: won ten races straight, and raced it and raced it and raced it, week after week – and I told Lindsay Cooper after it had won about four races, I said, 'Give her a go, something will get to her one day.' She was a natural mover, had natural rhythm, and she couldn't go any faster if you belted her all day with the whip. She was flat out when she was just galloping, like Black Caviar. I could ride Black Caviar and win, because it just loves galloping – it's a daisy cutter, just floats. When I really think about it – I had an interview the *The Messenger* [newspaper] people last week and it comes out, not today, it will be next week, they're doing an article – and I started off with this girl, I said, 'I've got two books home called *More Champions* [*Champions*] and another book called *More Champions*.' I said, 'There are 75 in one book and 72 in another so there's 150 champions, and that's only up to about 1985,' and I said, 'There have been a hell of a lot more since then.' You can only be champion in your era and that's why I won't buy into it and say this is the best ever –

It's too early.

– If you try and compare a horse to Phar Lap, it's stupid. Phar Lap won from 6 furlongs to 2¼ miles; Carbine won from 5 furlongs to 3 miles; Donaster [sic: Trafalgar] had 58 [sic: 59] races and the average distance he rode – he was a superb stayer, he was only a staying horse, by Wallace, son of Carbine – 58 starts and the average distance of those races were a mile and three quarters. He did nothing but race over a mile and a half, mile and three quarters, 2 miles, 2¼ miles, 3 miles. In one week he ran 2 miles, 2½ miles, 3 miles and 2 miles – 8½ miles [sic: 9½ miles] in one week – won 'em all – and did it twice.

When you talk about champions: Ajax in 1936, I mean, Ajax won five different races: he won the Newmarket Handicap as a three-year-old with 9 stone 4 [sic: 9 stone], which is a weight carrying record, so they raced him in weight-for-age races forever after because he used to get handicapped out of them, handicap races. He won five different weight-for-age races, three times each – and he rode in 18 races straight and he got beaten in a three horse race at

40/1 on – you had to put 40 on to win 1 – and he got beaten. My cousin, Norm Frearson, lost his job as an insurance collector. He'd collected money for the insurance company and he put the 40 bucks on Ajax and lost his job. I'll never forget that day – but they set him up: a three horse race – Allunga and Spear Chief. Allunga took him on. Ajax used to like to lead all the way, like Black Caviar – just stride along in front, but Allunga made a point of taking him on early and then Spear Chief came and knocked him off – beat him by half a length – like Colin Hayes did with Matrice, here in the Derby. Matrice was kicking all of Hayes's horses' brains out – top horse, Matrice. He'd be right up there with Comic Court – that's a horse that I'll always, always remember, Comic Court – he won a half mile; he won the Fulham Park Plate; won the Victoria Derby; won the Melbourne Cup and created an Australian record and eight weeks later he broke the Moonee Valley record for 6 furlongs – it still stands, for 6 furlongs and 20 yards, he still holds that record to this day, Comic Court.

[Note by Deb Gard who attended this interview: Alf did not use reference notes throughout the interview. Occasional errors in the above section have been rectified by Tim Gard, Alf's son. They are noted in square brackets. Tim also made the point that Alf was well aware of many of the actual facts – perhaps his concentration was focused ahead at the time. Above all else, Alf would have wished the record to be correct]

What I'd like to talk about now is some of the courses that - - -.

I mean I just laugh at people when they talk about this is the greatest horse - - - one of the greatest.

One of the greatest is probably the best, because you've just listed ten great horses at least.

I would say one of a hundred. I mean, we forget these horses like I'm talking about, Briseis and Auraria

But people only talk about what's happening now. They don't remember that past history, do they?

Yes they do – and I don't want to. See, I'd love to do a show right now on radio or television for old people, old timers.

That know these horses.

Yes. I know I'd have a thundering audience because old people have got nothing now. You watch television, and radio – there's nothing for elderly people.

It's all rubbish now, I think, isn't it?

I could come on and talk about great champions say from 1930 onwards, which covers everybody alive, old timers - - -.

And there would be an awful lot of people that would know – can you tell me about the various race courses – because we’ve only got Morphettville in Adelaide now?

Yes, well that’s a shame, they should never have sold it.

So can you talk about the courses that have closed and what they were like? Because I can certainly remember Victoria Park and Cheltenham. Why have we only got one racecourse in Adelaide?

Money – it was too expensive to run all four. My son, Tim, was Marketing Manager [Tim’s position was Administration Manager] at the Jockey Club, and he was always advocating, ‘Make one wonderful racetrack.’ I disagree with him – should be two.

Which one would you have kept – Victoria Park?

Cheltenham.

Why Cheltenham?

Well, Cheltenham is a racing area. There’s a lot of stables down there. I’m saying, when they sold Cheltenham, they lost a big lot of people who go to the races. They’d say, stick it up ya, you know. I know the Port crowd – I love em. I just love the spirit of Port Adelaide – they’re real people.

So those people, they wouldn’t be going to Morphettville now?

No, when they give you away, they give you away, but there are a lot of racing stables – it was horse country. They had Matson’s track which Colin Hayes used to tell his owners was his track – his private track – in the saltbush area down there, a mile track. The Matsons built that a hundred years ago, long before Colin Hayes was ever thought of. But then they had the beach at Semaphore and sand hills, like they’ve got down at Goolwa now – the Jollys [David] are doing very well here now, the trainers. They’ve got a training centre down at Goolwa, and [Dennis] O’Leary, an ex-copper, he’s winning a lot of races now and he’s got Comic Court Lodge down at Normanville. I tried to get a syndicate together to buy that many years ago. That’s right near the sea, just out of Normanville on the road to Second Valley. It’s right on the seafront: you’ve got this lovely flat country and then you’ve got the sand hills and the sea the other side. Betty Hobson bought it at one stage, an American woman, to start up quarter-

horse racing, put a track down there, but she didn't last long – quarter-horse racing, they wouldn't buy it here. It was going to be too much opposition.

What was Victoria Park like as a course?

They used to call it the course of natural beauty. There's something about Victoria Park – I think it was well-named, the course of natural beauty – but it was a bugger of a place to call on.

Why was that?

Well you're facing into the sun.

OK.

You've got the shadows along the East Terrace and in the afternoon you get horses running in and out of shade, and they get a long way away over at the 6½ furlong post – the farthest point of any racecourse. Joe Brown [Melbourne racecaller] came here one day and he said, 'Let's come and have a look at Victoria Park. You and Havey are talking about the straight five, furlong post'. I said, 'All right.' So we went down to the course and we got up in the box and Joe got his field glasses and he looked around, he said, 'Christ sonny, they get a long way away over there – that's a lot further away than Flemington'. I said, 'Yes, it slopes the wrong way coming around the home turn; the horses on the outside get half hidden but,' I said, 'have a look at the straight five, Joe.' He looked up the straight and said, 'What about all those gum boughs hanging over there.' I said, 'Yes, we can't see the outside horse stalls at the start of a sprint race.' You've got to wait until they come down about a furlong and make – if something jumps to the front on the outside, you don't see it until they've gone a furlong. Lady Jacobs phoned me one Friday night – I was complaining about it all day, it was a terrible day, and these bloody gum trees – and over at the 10 furlong post you had these bloody plane trees: when they're out the horses circling around used to be hidden by those trees, so you couldn't see them over there when you're trying to bring the colours right into your mind – the last minute, couldn't see them –

So in spite of being a pretty course, it's not a good course.

– So Lady Jacobs phoned me, 'Alf what's all this bloody business about the Victoria Park racecourse and the gum trees?' I said, 'Well, Lady Jacobs, it's a bastard of a place.' I said, 'It's time they did something about it, it's impossible.' She said, 'We'll get it fixed.'

What about Morphetville - - -?

But to finish that, she said, 'We'll send down – and we'll get it all fixed up, we'll get rid of this.' They cut the wrong ones down – they're still there, they're still there!

Whereas Morphettville is a smaller course – is that easier to call at?

Which one?

Morphettville, the one that's left.

Morphettville is not much trouble; Cheltenham's the easiest because we're right up the top – nobody can interfere with us, we're right up on the top deck – little boxes sticking up – like country dunnies. And they were little boxes too, had to climb a hundred steps to get there.

Did you do a lot of calling in the country?

No, not a lot, no. The ABC cut out country calling in about 1945. That was how they got rid of a lot of racing – 5AD took it over.

Now there's a very famous incident at Victoria Park with a motor bike. Tell me about that.

That was the Lord Mayor's Mile. I was on the course broadcast and it was a sunny day and they were going along the back of the course, along East Terrace, and as they came to where the intersection of South Terrace and East Terrace – you've got Beaumont Terrace [Road], then runs around on to Greenhill Road – just that part of the turn is the farthestmost point and I'm calling a race through – I got through to last of all is so-and-so, and as I said that I just spotted this set of colours about 10 lengths tailed off last. I said, 'There's one tailed off there – oh, it's a bloke on a motor bike with a pillion passenger,' and that's all – that's all.

So nothing?

I didn't say it went around the field and hit the front. If I'd done that I'd have said it ran off the course when it got to bloody Greenhill Road. But that's all it was – I just called it because that's as I saw it.

So really, it was a non-event.

It was a set of colours there that I fell for. I immediately – I didn't know what it was. I said, 'It's a bloke on a motor bike.' The colours didn't register, but they were there, a set of colours. It was one of those things, it was unfortunate, but I made a big joke of it.

Well, it is a joke, it's quite funny.

It is a joke but they've written stories about how it went around the outside, blah blah, and I went red in the face. I didn't at all, I was laughing. I could hardly call the bloody end of the race, I was laughing at myself.

Apart from all the radio work that you did, you also had a TV show as well, didn't you? Tell me a bit about how that came about.

It was my idea actually. I wanted to bring more racing to the public.

So you came up with the idea of it?

The Saturday night show, right from the start when I first started out, they decided to put me as compere of *Sports Cavalcade* on Tuesday night and a racing round-up on Saturday night with films – and they gave me the princely sum of £2 a week loading as a clothing allowance to get the bloody grease-paint taken off my shirt.

You only got your normal ABC salary?

Yeah, they gave for two television shows, you got £2 a week and it was called clothing allowance. I didn't get any rise at all.

That's ridiculous.

I know, and that's what I'm saying - - -.

Tell me about the two shows that you had, the Tuesday and the Saturday. Did you organise the format and how it went?

Yes, I was in charge of it all. *Sports Cavalcade* – I never liked the show very much. We had too much stuff from Sydney and Melbourne. I'd like to have made *Sportmen's Parade* – *Sports Cavalcade* a local show but we had to put in what was sent to us. We had an interview spot there that Mike Peterson did.

I remember Mike Peterson, yeah. What sort of sports were you covering?

All sports.

And did you get to choose, to a degree, what sports you covered?

We put on what was sent to us, except the interview here.

So, you did local interviews?

The local interview was usually a local identity that Mike interviewed.

So you'd get some input into how that went, as to who you picked for interviews, for example – did you pick who got interviewed?

No, no – Noel Bailey – usually a sporting supervisor: Arnold Ewens or - - -.

What about the Saturday night one?

That was all my show [*Sports Review*].

Right, what did you do on that one?

We had race finish films – the last 600 metres of each race. I did a studio call of that; I had a little sheet of paper – I used to, after a race was finished at the course, I had a little pad and write down so-and-so, so-and-so with the position as I remembered them from the six furlong post, straight after the race, I'd just put their names down and I used that, which I thought was better than replaying what had already been done because I was able to, instead of people having to wait to see what won the race I'd tell them what won the race: so- and-so, the winner, is lying sixth, with the light blue cap. They'd put the film on and then make little comments as they were coming down to the line – this is from the studio. This bloke, Bill White – I made a couple of blues there at one stage and Noel Bailey was the supervisor then, and he wrote a report that I was making mistakes. You can't make too many mistakes otherwise you wouldn't be on the course broadcast.

I got called into Bill White and he said, 'Alf, I've got a report here from Noel Bailey that he's a bit worried about your calls'. I said, 'Is that right, Bill?' I said, 'Well if that's the case, I mean I do a studio call – it's extra work for me, it's my memory – I like the way I'm doing it and so does the public but seeing you reckon I make so many mistakes I'm going to put the recall of my race, just replay the sound commentary, because I want to sit back and listen to all my mistakes, Bill.' I said, 'It's going to save me a lot of work,' and I did it that way. I said, 'So you can go and get nicked, Bill, if you want an argument about it. I'll replay what you reckon is a bad call. There's nothing like it – nothing like sitting back and listening to yourself make a fool of yourself.' So, that's what happened. Whatever Bill White said, I had the answer, and he didn't like it.

What time was the show on TV on Saturday night?

Quarter past seven, after the news – sometimes the news used to sneak an extra minute and it would make it very difficult for me because I had to do Melbourne results as well. I had to talk quickly.

How long did the show run for?

Quarter of an hour.

And how many years did it run for?

1960 to 1976.

That's a long time for one show, isn't it?

Yes, it was very popular. The Friday night show, we all but won the Logie in the last year – only a few weeks before I blew up on television. Bazza and Pilko [Barry Ion and Tony Pilkington] were talking about it – Alf Gard – Ted Boland told me, he said, 'You're running close to winning the local award for most popular local show.'

Did you go over to the Logies?

No.

What, they wouldn't send you or you - - -?

No, no – I didn't win it anyway but that's what happened. That news, really, that's when they started really to sabotage my work, and the day I blew up on television, there was sabotage all day, with the race films, camera went wrong - - -.

Let's lead into you blowing up on TV. Let's set the scene for that. What was the date?

It was 24th January 1976.

What happened that day? Talk us through the day.

Well, first of all I went into the studio on Saturday morning at about 8 o'clock to do turf notes. John Kelton used to ring up with the track gallops and scratchings. So I did that and I used to put the sheets around for the announcers of the afternoon. It was supposed to be done as a priority, and they were missing. So I wrote them all out and delivered them – that was the first thing that happened: all the sheets to put all the results down were not there. I got to the races at about half past 11 - - -.

Which racecourse?

Victoria Park – and went up to the box and there was a young technician I'd never seen before. I worked with 20 different technicians during my period. Joe Brown had one – Jack O'Brien was his race technician and they were a great team – Jack was interested in racing, like Joe – great team. I had to work with all sorts of different people – they all got their share

of overtime, Saturday, because they were 11 o'clock till 5 o'clock – overtime Saturday. You get much more money than I got for calling the races, sitting in the box, twiddling a bloody knob. Anyway this young bloke, I said, 'Goodday, what's your name?' and he told me, and I took a quick look – there were two monitor sets: one for radio and one for TV, and there were switches: one to switch on for the course broadcast and the other one for radio. I said, 'Sorry, lad, but you've got your equipment in the wrong places.' 'Oh, I've been told all about you, go to buggery,' – this young bloke. Now, if they had a new technician for the races, they used to send him out a week before to see what was going on and how to go about it. This chap knew nothing but he gave me cheek and I immediately – it wasn't long before the first race and I got really stirred up about it. I finally, I just changed the equipment over myself. I said to the lad, 'I can't operate – I've got glasses and I've got switches near my arm. My hands go like that [Alf demonstrates] to the right and you've got it the wrong way around.' It really upset me and I didn't do the race well – the first race well at all, and Tim came up to the box and said, 'What's wrong Dad?' I told him and he said it wasn't too good. I went down and had half a brandy with him which I never drank before the races and went back and the next thing, after about the third race, the woman doing the race finish films said the recorder broke down – missed the third race. I said, 'OK, I'll get in touch with Channel 7 and see if we can get it from Channel 7.' So that was done.

Then I got back to the studio and I was really upset and I got an Aspro from the make-up room. I was really feeling crook. Young John Hartley, a new producer from Melbourne, was the director of the show, and his script assistant – and they came in and said, 'Is everything all right, Alf?' I said, 'No, I don't feel too good – I'm just going to have a bit of a lie down for about a quarter of an hour. I'll meet you up in the viewing room at five past seven.' I used to go up with them and just run through them all, up in the viewing room. So I just had about a quarter of an hour on the couch in the dressing room, went up to the viewing room and John and his mate turned up at about 10 past – five minutes late – and I'm getting all stirred up again. They came to the second race and there was no sound on the tape. I just said to John, 'Everything's gone wrong – this is sabotage. Whatever is going on today is deliberate – this can't happen.' He said, 'I forgot to tell you.' I said, 'You forgot to tell me? I'm going to come on air, up comes the film and there's no sound on it. What do you think I'm going to do?' And we had an argument going down in the lift. He said, 'I wish you were like Joe Brown, in Melbourne.' I said, 'Hang on a minute, John.' He said, 'Joe Brown is so easy to work with.' I said, 'I've been with Joe Brown when he's crying in the studio, the same as I do. If you think Joe Brown was happy, have another think. We get stuffed around all the time, we just take it on the chin.' So he gave me a bit more cheek going down.

John Ovenden was down in the foyer when we got down near the studio, and I said, 'John, I'm going home, you'll have to do the show – you'd handle it, John.' I handed him the script and said, 'I'm going home.' I got in my car, I drove about a mile and I thought, that's not the way to go. I remember Mum and Dad saying, 'You finish the show whatever, show business is show business.' So I went back and I went into the control booth and I just said to John, 'Now, I'm going to spend the first three minutes telling the public what a mob of bastards I work with and then I'll finish the show and that's the finish, I'm out.' And that's exactly what I did. I said, 'If you cut me off, I'll kill the cameraman – I'm telling you, I'm hot. When I'm bloody hot, I know I'm hot – I'm dangerous, so just keep out of my bloody way.' I said, 'I mean it: if you chop me off, I'll kill the cameraman. I want to tell the public.' And that's what happened.

What did you say?

I just told them I'd been with the ABC for 38 bloody years and I said I love the place, but I hate it. Bob Francis said 'How can you say that in the one sentence?' I said, 'Well, I did love the place when we were young and we all worked as a family and we all worked to put on a good program, and there was no inner fighting, there was no jealousy. What happened with the ABC here is we had people coming from interstate: we had from Sydney, a manager; the assistant manager came from Queensland; the program director came from Melbourne; the sporting supervisor came from Melbourne; Bob Bower came from Melbourne; Mike Peterson came from Melbourne – all interstate people coming to Adelaide to have a nice easy 'coasty' life forever – they came and made a life here. They all wanted to come to Adelaide and have a bludge. I read that little piece to you from Charlie Buttrose, said about dummies getting state management. Well we had a heap of them here and it was very hard to take. We had people here who were very competent, like Chris Symons and Colin Hamilton – I could name ten blokes here who could have done the job, but Sydney took over. It became the Sydney Broadcasting – the whole of Australia has become Sydney and Canberra now, and Melbourne. The rest of us can go to – it's just, the whole country is wrong – we want state autonomy and I kept fighting for a state autonomy.

South Australians are different to other people – different to every state that I've been to, I've been to all states – they're all different types of people. They're like the communities in England. All the different types of people there are, they all get to settle in the one area. It's amazing how they congregate and find each other – they are different types of people and South Australia is a relaxed, easier-going life compared to the other states. You know darn well, if you go to Melbourne, you've got to move in the street – you can't loaf, you've got to almost run – watch Flinders Street Station – all weather. The only time they run here is when

it's raining. If the sun's shining they just loaf across and j-walk. If you drive a car around Adelaide, you've got to wait for people just to amble across the road. You couldn't do that in Melbourne, they'd knock you over – it's a different movement. I love Melbourne – when I'd been there nine weeks, I really grew to love it. I came back here, you almost push people out the way. Get moving. Adelaide's a sleepy town but people love it and it is lovable at times – I'm afraid I'm not one of those. I like life while you're here, let's live, let's play it up a bit.

I think your description of Adelaide and Melbourne is perfect, because I lived in Melbourne for a while as well.

One's alive and one's dead.

But they are both beautiful cities in different ways.

Yes, it is. I've got to agree – I don't want to leave Adelaide, but if I did, if I went to Melbourne I'd be three times as good as I ever was in Adelaide because the competition is there and you respond to competition. Most people with any ability respond to competition – if life is easy, you never give your best. Life is a game – if you go full bore, you come out laughing. It's like you're doing with this home now – you must feel wonderful, Deb, when you get up and paint a wall and make it look nice. There's something about doing things – it's easy to be lazy in Adelaide, it's the place to be lazy, that's how I'd describe it. If I had a slogan for Adelaide, it's 'the place to be lazy' – sit on your arse, get a public service job and have flexi-time and nobody cares. We're in a lost war – that's what I loved about the war: we all worked together – we had to work together – five o'clock in the morning, it just changed your whole life. You had to just get up and go, as a unit. There was no sitting on your arse in the air force.

I think you're probably right about Adelaide. By the time, when you left ABC, had it pretty well been taken over by Sydney people by then?

Yes.

So you were one of the few Adelaide people that survived.

Yes.

Take me back to that day when you walked out. You said your bit, did the show and then what happened?

Sunday morning I got a ring from Noel Bailey.

Let's stay with the Saturday – so you just drove home?

Yes.

What happened when you got home?

I just got on the piss.

That was the way to cope in those days, wasn't it?

I went to the hotel – actually I didn't come home, I went out to Edna Walford's place. I used to always get to Edna Walford's place when I was in an emotional downer. I knocked on her door and I can see her now, and old Ted, her husband, came to the door and they'd seen it and I said, 'I've just told the ABC what I think of them.' 'Yes,' she said. I said, 'It's the end.' She said, 'I'm certain you're right.' She didn't pull any punches, Edna.

You knew it was the end when you walked out though, didn't you?

She said, 'You shouldn't have done it.' I said, 'OK Edna, I shouldn't have done it – you say I shouldn't have done it. I did it and I'd do it again.' I think I did the right thing – I just couldn't take any more, just short of killing somebody. I said, 'You don't know what emotional intensity I was in that day, because there was deliberate sabotage of my work and I could see it happening.' The week before on *Stop the Week* – the last show of *Stop the Week* – it was a Friday night show, talk show – and I was sitting with Stuart Wagstaff, he was in the studio. We sat together and I had to do a little segment thought up by the directors: arm wrestling by two notable citizens – there were a couple of politicians there doing an arm wrestle – and they wrote a script, they were bloody awful, I hated it, about three or four minutes – and they had to keep going until I'd finished the script. Well, I'm reading away and all of a sudden Stuart Wagstaff said, 'They've finished the wrestle, Alf,' and I'm still reading the description. So that was sabotage: John Green introduced me that night as Alf Gard. He said, 'Alf Gard is a bloke who writes letters to himself.' I let that go through to the keeper – this is only a week before the night happened. I could see it all happening – it was baiting me, really baiting me, knowing if you bait me enough, I'll blow – and they over-baited me.

After the show when you'd said your bit, what happened in the studio? Did you talk to anyone or did anyone say anything?

No, no, I went straight to the car and drove out to Burnside, top of Greenhill Road – Edna had a little home out there. I spent two to three hours with her.

And then you came home?

Yes.

What did you tell your family? Had they seen the show?

I don't recall what I said then, I just don't. It was a shocker. I just finally went to sleep – that's all I know, but I woke up in the morning and Noel Bailey was on the phone - - -.

Before we do that, your daughter just made a comment - - -.

[Comment from Deb Gard]: We were away at the time – my mother and I – we were in Hawaii when it happened, so Dad went to his own home at the time.

OK. So it was a bit of a blur for you for that first day?

Yes.

What happened on the Sunday?

On Sunday, Noel Bailey phoned me and said, 'Look, Graham Taylor has told me to give you a ring to tell you that you've been suspended until further notice, or will you apologise?'

Sorry, I missed that, what was the name of the person who rang you?

I do recall – I was living with Elaine Holmes then. I was in Elaine Holmes home, we had a flat out at North Adelaide – that was right – and I said to Elaine, 'Grab the other phone' – twin phones, she had. I said, 'Get on the other phone, would you Elaine? This is Noel - - -.'

Sorry, I just missed, who was the person that rang you?

Noel Bailey, sporting supervisor. We were good mates during the Olympic Games [in 1956] but Noel turned on me in the finish - - -.

So he gave you the option of apologising?

Yes, verbally, he gave me the option and I got an affidavit written by Elaine Holmes, but they wouldn't let me read it in court because it wasn't signed by a J.P. There were two or three letters like that that weren't signed by J.P.s, but Elaine wrote down the whole thing. Then the next Tuesday I got a letter from Graham Taylor confirming that I'd been suspended until further notice.

Suspended without pay?

Yes, but no word about the apology option in the letter, which I was very cross about. That's when I phoned Anne Franklin at the Australian Journalists' Association and Anne said, 'You

get in touch with Stanley & Partners and we'll back you up,' the AJA, 'and go to the Industrial Court.' I went to Stanley & Partners and then the case started from there.

Let's just stop there because we've only got a few minutes, and we'll start the legal case on the next tape.

Right.

DISC 5 recorded on 8 May 2012

You've just described, on the previous tape, the circumstances that led to you being sacked – well, suspended from Channel 2, and the AJA took up your case with the lawyers, Stanley & Partners, so how did you feel at that stage, that you were going to go to the Industrial Court – was that the right way? Would you have been prepared to apologise?

No –

Right, so you wanted to take it to court - - -.

– No, my answer to that to Noel Bailey was, 'No bloody way will I apologise for something I said in public. What I said, Noel, is true and it stands, so there's no chance of me apologising – I've got nothing to apologise for. I really told the public about the ABC,' and I said, 'I'm not the first one to do it – it's been written before; there've been a lot of complaints but I –.'

But you were the first that actually went on air - - -.

– but I told the public and since the public pays for the ABC, they're entitled to know. That's what's wrong with this country: we've got weak leaders. If I was the leader – the public service to me is a disgrace: a lot of mates, families – it's all a big happy family – put your mate in, not the best man. I've seen it happen so much: the Walker family, the Taylor family – look at the credits: mother and father, sisters, brothers. It's what's wrong with Australia; it's what's wrong with the world – when you start putting your mate in instead of the best bloke, you haven't got the best team. You can't win a premiership with a bloody lousy team – your mates aren't worth a crap to you. You want somebody to play for South Australia, you want the best, not your mate.

OK, let's talk about your case. The AJA took you on straight away – they agreed you had a good case.

Yes, they backed me, yes.

Anne Franklin that you mentioned – what was her role at the AJA?

She was the Secretary.

So, what happened next? You had the letter on the Tuesday from the ABC saying you're suspended.

The next Friday we went to the Industrial Court – Justice Chislett.

How do you spell that?

C-H-I-S-L-E-T-T.

And what sort of hearing did you get on that day?

The ABC's representative had his say.

Do you remember who was representing the ABC?

Bleby – I think it was Bleby. But they had their say and then Justice Chislett – it was a Friday – and he said, 'Monday, Mr Gard, I'd like to hear your story.' Then the ABC went straight to the Supreme Court - - -.

On the Friday?

Yes, and took out an injunction restraining Justice Chislett from hearing me on the grounds that he didn't have jurisdiction.

Why did they say he didn't have jurisdiction? It was clearly an industrial case.

ABC is a federal body – and this is what they did. I told you about Sir Garfield Barwick – we'll come to that in a minute, put it on tape for you. So we had to wait quite a few weeks for the Supreme Court to become available and there was Justice Bray, the Chief Justice and Sangster and Hogarth. We had quite a short hearing and a majority of two to one sent it back to the Industrial Court.

Who was the dissenting one, do you know?

Hogarth.

So they agreed that the Industrial Court had coverage?

Yes. That's where everybody thought – I got congratulations; people phoned me up and said, 'You've got them now, Alf,' and I thought I had them too. But that didn't happen – the ABC went straight to the High Court.

Again, on the same basis that it didn't have coverage in the South Australian Industrial Court.

That's right. So they just didn't want me to be heard. They took it to the High Court. The High Court took quite a few months to come to Adelaide – I reckon it was about 12 months before I got a hearing in the High Court.

They only ever come once or twice a year, don't they, to Adelaide?

That's right. They were just keeping me out of the public eye.

What were you doing all this time?

I was on the dole, and I was getting very embarrassed. They locked me right out – I couldn't get a job anywhere –

Because no-one's going to employ you when you're waiting for a court decision.

– I was black-balled by the media.

What about your friends? How did your friends treat you – because you couldn't get a job; you were on the dole?

I just made my way. It was very difficult – the next ten years was a very difficult ten years, from 1976 to 1986. It was hard living, I moved 13 times – moved home. I never had any money, behind in my rent – it was one hell of a time. But came the High Court and – what was his name – a QC from Queensland, John McClellan – he came over here with David Wilson and I heard David Wilson, just as we walked into the High Court, he said, 'Oh, you wouldn't give him much chance if you heard what he said.' David never knew this, in the wind-up of my case ten years later, Justice Johnston said, 'Your lawyers ruined your case.' I know they did. He [David Wilson] put in two statements of claim: one said I was sacked, the other one said I was suspended. He was a big Scotsman, David Wilson – finished up Commissioner to advise Legal Aid and that's when he dropped my case. He took me to lunch – walking down the footpath he said, 'I can't go on with you, Alf, because I've just been appointed the Commissioner to advise Legal Aid.' I said, 'That's the perfect position to be in, you know my case.' He said, 'No, you'll have to go to one of my partners.'

And he'd had the case right from the start, and then he just dropped you.

Yes, then Fred Field took over from Stanley & Partners, and he did nothing for five years but sit on everything. After five years I got my private file, got Derek Bollen, I got him to do an opinion. He said I couldn't win a damages action – big long opinion he wrote, but I still went ahead with it and I conducted my own case.

Before we move into that, what was the High Court decision? We missed that bit.

Right – the High Court decision: it was a very short hearing. Sir Garfield Barwick made a statement – really I should've taken the case over myself there and then, but being in the High Court I was told to shut my mouth: 'Whatever you do, Alf, don't interfere,' David Wilson just said to me. I mean, I was ready to go crazy and to this day I don't know how I didn't yell at Sir Garfield Barwick when he made this bloody terrible statement, 'Mr McClellan, your client worked for the Australian Broadcasting Commission,' – took a big sniff – 'the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Mr McClellan, is a government instrumentality – it therefore enjoys the shield of the Crown, and your client can't challenge it.' It was like putting a gun at me and I thought well, that's the end of that. I thought, there and then, the case was over, but there was very little argument about it at all and they went into a reserve judgement. Twelve months later I picked up the Adelaide News and the stop press said: High Court upholds the ABC's appeal. That was the end of the industrial case, and I'd not been heard.

You've never spoken in court?

No, only when I took my case up in the Supreme Court later on. And when I got my private file through Derek Bollen – I had to get a bill of discovery – and I got it, that thick [Alf demonstrates] – my private file from the ABC.

You got that under a freedom of information thing?

Yes. There's character assassination; letters from Bill White, Dick Freaney, Graham Taylor, Noel Bailey, damning me as a person. One of the letters from Graham Taylor said, 'I understand how Mr Gard was divorced several years ago, I understand the reason was mutual agreement and/or mental cruelty.' I took that, when they tried to settle the case in 1985 with Mr Kelly up in the Crown Solicitor's office – Graham Taylor turned up with an accountant. It was going to be a three way meeting just to discuss it. They'd made me an offer which was ridiculous and I put in a counter offer, and I took my divorce papers up with me and this letter from Graham Taylor. Before we started to talk, I said, 'First of all, Mr Kelly,

it's a word I don't like using but Mr Taylor is a cee.' I said, 'I ought to knock him out the window right now,' and I said, 'Let's get it straight, Graham, that's what you are,' and I handed my divorce papers over to him: mutual consent. Then I handed a letter over to him where he'd put 'mental cruelty', and that's in the letter to the General Manager. I should have taken it up there and then but I never went ahead with those things. I tried to let it go through to the keeper. I've had so many dreadful things said about me, I'm just used to it, I'm just used to it because I'm not guilty.

What happened when the Crown Solicitor tried to settle? You said they made you a ridiculous offer. What did they offer you?

3000 – it was 7000 altogether that was owing to me actually – my long service leave, but they wanted to take the High Court payment out – it was \$3000; they cut \$4000 out for High Court fees, which didn't go ahead. I just refused anything; I didn't want any more to do with them. I said, 'I want no play.' I put in an account of \$252,000 which I think was half price at that time. I had all my reasons for what I'd done and what I should have got, but they never considered it at all.

What happened after that? You obviously refused to accept what, \$3000 was nothing.

That's right. I've got the cheque home, the cheque is there now. I never cashed it, it's there with the letter. I just phoned and said I'm going to take you to court for damages. Derek Bollen – I said, 'I think you're wrong, Mr Bollen. I think I can win this case.' I went to the Supreme Court and saw Mr Garsden, the Registrar. I was wild that day: I went in, had to prepare all my own case and took it into the Registrar Office and behind the counter, they didn't have some of the forms. The first set I did was on the wrong size paper – I did it on foolscap instead of A4 – had to go and do it all again.

So you were suing them for damages?

Yes, damages, yeah: unspecified damages.

You would have qualified for legal aid, or - - -.

I had legal aid.

Right, and were they any good?

Yeah, well I never paid anything.

But you had to do all the preparation.

I did all the preparation myself and I saw Mr Garsden. He got me upset in the front office and I was shouting and screaming at them – bloody forms were missing; even during the case, at the end of the case I wanted to get a form – they'd run out of forms. I went with Tim Anderson, the opposing lawyer, and I just finished up – I was too crook – it finished up with, 'I just can't go on anymore'. Dr Cowling said, 'You'll go mad.' He said, 'Give it up, Alf.' They really wore me right down to the finish.

So the doctor told you not to go ahead.

Yeah, I was very dangerous then. But Justice Johnston was wonderful – Mr Garsden – get back to him: I was carrying on in the front office and the Chief Clerk said, 'Would you like to see Mr Garsden, the Registrar?' I said, 'I want to see the top bloke.' I walked into his office – I'd learned a little bit by now of the ins and outs of the law. I sat down and he said, 'What's your trouble, Mr Gard?' I said, 'Mr Garsden I need your aid and you're going to have to help me,' and I said, 'You have to help me, it's part of your job.' He said, 'Well you're right,' and he did, he steered me into a couple of ways to go about it, and he was very good. So I went ahead with the case and - - -.

Against doctor's advice?

Not at that stage – that was right at the end of the case, after the second day's hearing in the Supreme Court. I got to a point where I wanted Colin Hamilton to – I forget the term now, see it's where the brain is not quite clicking in this morning. I - - -

Who was Colin Hamilton?

He was the Program Director of TV and he wrote a letter saying that Mr Gard would respond if he were treated differently, and there's a laissez-faire way that technicians are working with other programs as well as Mr Gard's. It was all in my favour but it wasn't signed by a J.P. and I wanted to get this form to subpoena him. What the ABC did – I had him down as a witness – when it came to calling Colin Hamilton, they put him on to an appeals tribunal at the ABC. They did everything they could to stop me being heard. Colin said, 'I can't get away because I'm on this tribunal.' So Justice Johnston said, 'Well you'll - - -' – he gave me an hour to get Colin Hamilton into that court. I had to get a subpoena and get it delivered to Colin Hamilton. I'd spoken to him on the phone. I went into the office with Tim Anderson and there were no subpoena forms, and Tim said, 'I'll write one out,' and I said, 'When are they going to turn this, when are we going to get some competency? I just can't take anymore, Tim.' Hamilton would have – he wrote me a letter qualifying it afterwards, but that letter – Justice Johnston wouldn't accept it because it wasn't signed by a J.P. That could've

turned the case. But the summary was that I'd had a moral victory and all costs against the ABC, all costs: the Industrial, Supreme and the High Court.

That would have been a huge amount of money.

God knows how much it cost the government – they could have given me half a million dollars and come out a big winner, and that would have been hardly justified after 38 years – not a lot of money. But no, so I got my \$7000, which was originally mine, which they'd sat on for 10 years, no interest. They sent me the cheque for 7000 and that's the end of it.

Then what happened to you – your health was a mess by then?

Health?

Yes.

Ohh, it knocked me right out – never been the same, won't ever be the same because it's in my heart. If duelling were still in vogue, I'd challenge five blokes to a duel tomorrow.

Tell me who the five blokes are.

Sir Garfield Barwick, Sir Charles Moses, Sir Talbot Duckmanton, W.E. [Bill] White, and Graham Taylor – and they're the ones, I reckon I can still win if I put a case up for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. It was collusion – Charles Moses and Barwick lived in the same street, they belonged to the same societies. What happened, when I looked like getting on top in the Supreme Court, Sir Charles Moses would have bought his way into it. He'd go to Sir Garfield Barwick and take, took it out to the High Court. Should never have happened – the Supreme Court really had jurisdiction in South Australia. But getting back to the start of the ABC: how it all happened was I went on contract in 1966 – I didn't want to go on contract. Let's go through from the beginning – I'll quickly go through the beginning. I came back from the war and they made a job for me: Sporting Assistant, Grade 1. They made a Sporting Assistant in each state: they had Grade 3 in Melbourne – Grade 1, 2 and 3 in Melbourne; Grade 1, 2 and 3 in Sydney; Grade 1 for the minor states: Sporting Assistant on an establishment basis.

Full-time position.

Yes, full-time. This is 1947. I got the annual little increments of £1 – £1 and something to take me to the top of Grade 1. I was that until 1954, seven years. I married in 1947. Just before I was married I was doing a little show on Sunday morning, a monthly program, *Youth Club of the Air*, Sunday morning. That was worth – I think they gave me £1.10 to do

that, and I was getting a little bit of overtime and penalty rates for Saturday working from 8 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock at night, sometimes through to deputy trots until 11 o'clock – 8 o'clock to 11 o'clock with a luncheon break and luncheon allowance and car mileage – it was seven years. In 1948, we'd just been married, and Charles Moses brought out a Determination 15: officers whose hours are indeterminable no longer qualify for overtime and penalty rates, and sporting assistants were the worst sufferers because we worked every Saturday and public holiday on sport. But it happened with the youth education – two or three sporting assistants all came under this classification: Determination 15. So I lost that £3½ a week just after I was married. In 1954, that's seven years I'd been on Grade 1, I'd become deputy trotting broadcaster; deputy race broadcaster; I was broadcasting football, cricket, tennis; doing the sports shows three nights a week, most Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays – no over-time, no penalty rates. So you can see, we were struggling and on a very low salary, Grade 1. That Determination was challenged by the staff association in the High Court and the High Court ruled that we should be paid, compensated for. I forget the amount it was, now, but they gave us a payment for those seven years – it was peanuts, really – it wasn't anything like it should have been.

Then in 1954, that was the year the Queen came out here and people were becoming pretty impressed with my work, and they bumped me up to a Grade 4: jumped me from Grade 1 to Grade 4. I complained about that, I said, 'I should be a Sporting Assistant, special duties. No other sporting assistant was broadcasting races. George Grljusich was calling trots in Western Australia, but I was the one – Norman May always said he'd never try to broadcast it; Bob Bower – never tried it; Mike Peterson, Bob Bower – they won't touch it. It's a job that nobody wanted because it was a bloody tough job, and a very highly responsible job. So, I go to Grade 4, then came the Olympic Games in 1956 and that's when I met up with Bill White: I've told you the story about that and what I said to him and how it all happened – that 'I'd never bloody well be satisfied' and I said, 'All I'm asking is to be on a Sporting Assistant, special duties', to be like Norman May and Bobby Richardson, Brian McLennan – there were three chosen blokes at the ABC doing the Olympic Games and the interstate cricket and test cricket and Davis Cup tennis – those three commentators handled the big jobs and it paid well. Racing is just twice as hard as any of them.

So, in 1956 they put me up to a Grade 5, the top for a Sporting Assistant then, which wasn't a great salary rise – that's 1956. In 1958 I took over racing completely. In the meantime, I was pressing to get this special duties job. Then in 1961, Clem Semmler, Dr. Clem Semmler came over here from Sydney – he was Assistant General Manager of Programs – and he took me for a drink. He said, 'You're the best race broadcaster here, Alf.' I said, 'Clem, I've been trying to get a fair go, Sporting Assistant, special duties.' He said, 'Well look, put in a claim and

we'll push it through' – 1961. I thought, well I'm going to be happy now, at last I'll get something done. So I put this letter in of application for Sporting Assistant, and I gave it to Jimmy Miller, the new manager for the ABC – he came from Western Australia – happy-go-lucky bloke, loved the pub, took everybody for a drink, but didn't do his job. So I gave it to Jim, I said, 'It's written to Talbot Duckmanton,' and it was all authorised by Clem Semmler.

A year went by, never heard from them; two years went by, I never heard from them, so I wrote a letter to Duckmanton and said I don't know what's happened to my application. Jim Miller put it in his drawer: it was three years – it was three years Jim sat on it that I didn't know about, and of course I put in a nasty report in about Jim Miller to the General Manager: I said, 'This is my whole life I'm talking about.' And Jim just flatly said, 'Alf, I thought you were doing the wrong thing, I thought you were applying for a contract.' I worded it in a way that if it didn't go through I'd have no choice but to think about undertaking contract conditions because I couldn't go on being king of the racecourse and shit of the ABC. I needed the standing, the recognition of a race broadcaster – I'm starting to lose track of it for a minute – let me settle - - -. [a short pause is taken in recording]

OK, 1964. In 1965, W.E. White came here as Manager. He wrote a letter to the General Manager – about a nine page letter of character assassination, and he didn't think much of my work. I didn't know about this until I got this private file in 1985, twenty years later. I never knew the letter had been written, but it's there, it's on file now; it's a letter that must be published, I should give you that. That letter should be published – you'll see why this man was out to get me. I never knew he'd written that document to Clem Semmler. He hadn't been here long when he recommended that I go before the CMO, medical officer, for psychoanalysis, and I had to go up to the ? building. They flew a doctor over from Sydney and I had Dr Lepidus here, and they gave me a grilling for about three hours. They had tapes, they'd been given tapes and documents, and I answered everyone, as they put it, to their complete satisfaction.

Dr Lepidus, when we'd finished, he said, 'Well, Mr Gard, you have a remarkable memory, you have satisfied us on all counts and we're going to break the laws of this department – we want you to sit there while we ring your manager. And Dr Lepidus phoned Bill White and said that Mr Gard had completely satisfied them and that it was disgusting, the documentation they had against me – 'Mr Gard had explained to our content, and will you apologise to Mr. Gard on behalf of the ABC?' So I went back to the ABC and Bill White welcomed me in and he poured me a glass of whisky. He said, 'Alf, I'm glad everything went all right.' I said, 'Yes, Bill, I'm just amazed at what you people have tried to do to me. This is a vendetta.' I said, 'But have you got anything else to say to me, Bill?' He said, 'No, what do you

mean?’ I said, ‘Well,’ – I couldn’t tell them that the doctor was breaking the rules of their department, I can’t to this day, tell what Dr Lepidus told him to do. He never apologised. So I said, ‘Bill, if you haven’t got anything more to say, I don’t drink with bastards,’ and I threw the glass of whisky up against his wall behind his desk and walked out and slammed the door – that was 1965.

Then he persevered to get me on contract. He wanted me off the staff – that I was worrying everybody, Bob Bower was putting in for positions all over Australia to get away from Alf Gard – all this sort of thing is in his letter. In 1961 [1965], he just hammered me – ultimatum: either go on contract or give up race broadcasting, come back and do your just ordinary sporting assistant work. It was an ultimatum, which he kept denying and I fought him. Then I got a contract from – the first contract they sent me from Sydney wanted me to abide by the law, from time to time, in vogue in New South Wales. I said, ‘I’m not going to sign that.’ I went to Jack Alderman, the barrister; I went to Don Dunstan. They said, ‘No, you can’t sign that. They can’t hold you to law courts of New South Wales.’ They [the ABC] said, ‘The same as all other race broadcasters.’ So I sent this copy to Joe Brown in Melbourne and he put little notes on it – they gave me [Alf] two weeks annual leave; Joe Brown [noted]: I got three. My sick leave is cumulative – yours is not. They short-changed me all the way down the line, and they had one clause there, that I wasn’t to come into the studio without a prior appointment with the supervisor – and I wouldn’t sign it. So I had about three or four different contracts and finally, one by one, I got it changed around until finally I signed a contract in 1961 [1965]. I got Canon Ray to come with me. I said, ‘I don’t trust two or three officers in the ABC, Canon, would you come to the signing of this contract?’ And he just said to me, ‘Alf, I think you can trust the ABC.’ I said, ‘I trust the ABC but I don’t trust two or three senior officers.’

So I signed the contract: annual basis, on a parity salary, on a parity of Sporting Assistant, Grade 5 – the equivalent, and that was going to be an annual renewal – ABC had the right of renewal each year – that went on until 1972 and I was getting dissatisfied, and I got a letter from Murray Gordon – a new administration had taken over. Before I signed the contract, the night before I signed the contract, I phoned Duckmanton in Sydney at his home, Sunday night, and I asked him – we were at rehabilitation school together in 1945 after the war, in Sydney, so I knew him. I said, ‘Tal, I want your promise that nothing will happen to me without you hearing me before my accusers.’ I said, ‘I don’t trust a couple of blokes here.’ I had a long conversation with him on the Sunday night, and he said, ‘You go ahead and sign the contract and I’ll see that it’s done.’ He was the only man who could cancel my contract, from that phone call.

In 1972 I got a letter from Murray Gordon, administrator in Sydney, saying they wanted permission to change my contract to whoever is General Manager can change my – can terminate my employment, and I wouldn't sign it, and I never signed another contract until 1976. I just worked on a weekly basis and there were no rises. I was the only bloke who didn't get CPI rises – that's all in writing. They just cut me back, cut me, until it all led up to me blowing up in 1976. So, I was just fighting an army – I just would not let somebody else have that right. Duckmanton promised to come and see me, through McLelland, and Richie Gun [S.A. Labor politician] took my case up. It went to the top – it went to [Malcolm] Fraser; I put a report in the Dix report. I've got letters that say, 'Mr Duckmanton will come and see you with McLelland at the first opportunity.' He came to Adelaide several times but he always managed to get past me. I never saw Duckmanton and I never saw Moses.

When we came back from the war, Charles Moses came around to all states and said, 'If any of you returned blokes have any problems, get straight in touch with me.' Well, I tried to get in touch with Moses and Duckmanton from 1941 to 1976 but I never got to first base. They dodged me – when we got our 15 year gongs, Moses came over and he called me an old reprobate and I just looked him in the face and said, 'Yes, that bloody word refers to you in one way too, Sir Charles,' and I said, 'I understand you're the amateur heavyweight champion boxer of Victoria.' He was a champion axeman too. I said, 'But only bloody idiots fight amateur heavyweights.' I just taunted him and I actually threw my medal up against the wall in the big studio. I never liked Moses at all. He was a flowery bloke; they all say he had a lovely voice. He had one of those flowery, whispery voices, a velvety voice. He claims the synthetic cricket broadcast in 1932, that he did it – Alan McGilvray was the one tapping the pencil on a coconut shell, the ball – bat hitting the ball. Alan McGilvray was the key to that but Moses liked to claim everything. His secretary, what was it – Jackie Black, Jackie Black I think was her name – she did all Moses's work for him. It's all been written in a book called *This Is The ABC*. I gave you a note of the –

Yes I've got them, yesterday - - -.

– of those books – it's interesting reading. Edgar Dawes, Vice Chairman of the ABC, the longest standing Vice Chairman for many many years, Edgar Dawes, he wrote that most of the commissioners were only in there for their own perks, they knew nothing about broadcasting and television. Commissioners in the main, 75 per cent of commissioners were just mates and knew nothing about the game. When I called the ABC incompetent, I was right on the ball. Several statements made by Clem Semmler in his books say much worse than I said on television. It's just a job for the boys. Like Sir Garfield Barwick said: it turned into a £30 million a year paper machine, not a broadcasting set-up – it's all administration,

there's paper everywhere. The programs now, when you look at the ABC programs and what they used to be, it's bloody terrible. Monday night is pretty good programming but even that is getting a bit stale now: *Q & I* [*Q & A*], you get the same crowd on there.

I've given up on that one, I'm afraid.

They talk a lot of rubbish.

I think they still do a good job with *Four Corners* and *Australian Story* on Monday night. They're both good shows, but it's not the calibre it used to be, is it, the shows?

It's not. The key to a lot of the big programs was Michael Charlton when he did *Four Corners* – he's a class act, and he went to BBC and he said he would return, but he never did. We had poor management – they knew nothing, most of them were academics and accountants – they're different people, different brains. All they do is out to save a quid and cheat people.

What about how ABC does sport now? What do you think of how they do it now?

It's nothing, nothing like – that's why I said I loved it for what it was, I hate it for what it is, I loved it for what it could be – what I tried to make it be. I tried hard to get the public on-side. The ABC couldn't give a stuff about the public, they just made themselves – the General Manager gets \$700,000 a year – what for, I'm bugged if I know. It's just murder. When you think of council boys getting \$300,000 a year – it's big money, but they see that the bloke at the head gets millions – they all want to be Mr Big. Well, you just can't. There is a word called can't. They're just greedy. They're going to take another per cent, 10 per cent rise shortly – that's \$40,000 a year rise.

Some people would love to live on just the rise, wouldn't they?

Our last rise, the T.P.I. rise, was \$3.50 a week, \$3.50 – that's a bit different to \$40,000. I mean, who the hell do they think they are? They've stuffed the country. If the country was blooming – they say it's blooming – it's not, it's in debt to buggery. One day we're going to have to pay it back. It's all figures, they manipulate figures. You can do what you like with figures. They're the greatest con people in the world – they're not out for the public – the public are hurting now and the public are rising up now.

We're seeing a lot of that happening in Europe, aren't we?

Well, it will happen again, there'll be another Hitler will rise because somebody will – I'm not for Hitler, but he got the world out of a depression, and it was a tough way to do it but

somebody had to stop the depression because it was getting worse and worse and worse and worse and there was no hope. The depression went for about eight years and then on top of that you had a five year war – the trouble with the world, we haven't had a war for 60 years, that's what's wrong with the world. You've got three generations, four generations have grown up without a war – Korea and Vietnam, minor wars, but a world war, we haven't had one for 60 years, the whole world, and that's what's wrong. It's part of civilisation – you just can't go on breeding human beings forever and ever and ever, and destroy everything else. The world has got too many people – that's all there is to it –

You're a real thinker, aren't you, Alf?

– and now they're encouraging it, they're trying to stop it now, but to give kids 5000 bucks to have a baby and give them a housing trust home, and what are they going to do? The kids grow up – they're living all around me – single mothers with babies in their housing trust places, first priority, and \$5000 to start with. They go and stick it on the poker machines, so they've got nothing. They're just going to be an indictment on the public for the rest of their lives – they're never going to work. They wouldn't know how to work, they don't have to.

I'm not disagreeing with you, am I?

No.

OK. There's one little story you told me at lunchtime yesterday that we should have put on tape, and that was when you were approached to work for the Murdoch press. Tell me that story again.

I was at Mick Goreham's 21st birthday party over at – what's the name of the entertainment place over at Fulham, not Rivett's, some name like that. They have a lot of receptions there anyway. It was Mick Goreham's, jockey, 21st birthday party and he invited me and I was standing in the foyer on my own and these two chaps from *The News* came up to me, *The News and Mail*, two little blokes, bald-headed blokes. I can't help but note that bald-headed blokes always give a bit of cheek – 'You're Alf Gard, you'd be the biggest shit-stirrer in Adelaide.' I said, 'Well it's nice to be the biggest something, isn't it?' I just took him very quietly; I thought here's two cocky little bastards – 'How would you like to write feature articles, shit-stirring articles, for *The Mail*, feature stories?' I said, 'It would be good, my son has just gone to Sydney to do a vet course and I can hardly afford it.'

That's when I started to do this little book to try and get a quid and I'd done the *Footy World* for *The Guardian*. I was trying to make a quid somehow to get Tim through; my mother-in-law, Wanda, she helped a fair bit. But I said, 'That would be lovely, just fits in nicely with Tim

gone to university.' I said, 'OK, what's the deal for me?' They said, 'You'll be top grade, AJA rating, and entertainment lounge, for a top feature writer.' I said, 'That's pretty good, that's nice.' I said, 'When is your deadline?' – 'We usually deadline Mondays.' I said, 'What about Monday week?' – 'Yes, that's good – what have you got in mind, Alf?' I said, 'Well, if I'm going to shit-stir, let's start at home. I'll do a shit-stirrer story on Rupert Murdoch and the News Group.' And they said, 'Don't be a stupid bastard, Alf, you can't do that,' and I just grabbed them by the shirt front and pushed them up against the wall and said, 'You can go and tell Rupert Murdoch from me, I wouldn't work for him if he paid me a million dollars an article. I just won't write the way he wants.' So that was that story.

I like that story.

And that was because of the – it was all over *The News*: the little question I put on *Sportsmen's Parade* years before, 'What runs last three times a week – a day – what runs last three times a day and is a big winner? – *The Adelaide News*.' The three last editions were the dot, the two dots and two stars and three dots – four – and Murdoch never liked it. I got called before management over that.

You did a lot of writing though, in your career, didn't you?

I wrote for *Racetrack*, *The Thoroughbred*, *The Vintage Echo* – that was a local paper here; I wrote the Aged Cottage Homes, *Out and About*; I did my little book.

What's your little book? Tell me about your book.

The Melbourne Cup book.

Yes, it's not a little book, it's – actually I've got it here. It's called *The Melbourne Cup, 1861-1966*.

Yes, could Tulloch have won with that weight? I wrote that book to question whether – everybody said he should have run it and he would have won it. I'm still doubtful that he would have, and the story, it's all there: all the different three-year-olds, where they ran; horses that won the Derby and didn't win the Cup. It's a very factual book – it got a wonderful write-up in *Winning Post* a couple of years ago, and it's been valued at \$82 [Alf laughs].

And the price on it was 30 cents.

I printed 50,000. I sent 20,000 to Melbourne; 20,000 to Sydney and the rest to the other states. It sold out in Melbourne and I got a ring from Sydney after the Cup had been run:

‘What do you want to do with your 20,000 books?’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ They said, ‘It’s still in the factory’ – they never put it out. A chap named Bob Horgan, *Australian Book Company* - - -.

Yes, I know them.

Well, I gave it to him to handle first of all and he sat on it for 12 months, for some reason, I don’t know, but I took it away from him and I flew to Melbourne and I went to Collins Bookshop in Melbourne and they took it up and they delivered it around, and the 20,000 went to Percival Press in Sydney, and Bob Horgan happens to be a director of Percival Press, and it never hit the streets – 20,000. I couldn’t do anything about it, I had no money. I said, ‘Just burn the bastards.’ I don’t know what happened to that 20,000. But Kevin Sattler [S.A. racing journalist] phoned me from Melbourne, two or three days before the Cup. He said, ‘It’s selling out, they’re going mad at Flinders Street Railway Station.’ He said, ‘Get a reprint, if it’s going to sell 20,000 here, it’ll sell 100,000 in Sydney.’ I think it was 25,000 were sold all told, but I did that for the public for 30 cents.

How long did it take you to put it together? It’s a substantial publication.

It was a lot of work. I was sitting up here night after night, late. I went through *Cup Day*, a book called *Cup Day*. I think Bob Horgan thought it was a sort of plagiarism – I’d shortened stories down that were in *Cup Day*, but the research that I did for every three-year-old over all those years – Tommy Smith [trainer] wrote me a lovely letter that there was a lot of information in it. There is, you learn a lot from that book. Not only that, I summed it all up in the importance of weight-for-age – there are a few mistakes in it, I’ll tell you.

There are always a few publishing mistakes.

You’ve got to find them, I don’t - - -.

Well, I certainly wouldn’t be able to find them, would I? [Allison laughs]

On that page [Alf indicates], the summary, it’s all there.

We’re referring to page 24.

It’s easy to put a lot of figures together, but to summarise it all - - -.

An amazing amount of work in that.

It was unreal, I was sitting up to all hours of the night.

It's an absolute credit to you, and I know people valued that, but I didn't realise it was up to \$80.

Peter Tonks, years ago, he wanted to take it up and bring it up to date – it still could be done. That book could still be brought up to date, although - - -.

It would still be a big job though.

The thing about it, the thing about it is that in the early days the three-year-olds used to get nothing on their backs: 6 stone 7; 6 stone 10 – little boys rode them, it's all in here [the book], but then weight-for-age came out and three-year-olds had to carry 7 stone 6, not 6 stone 10 and 6 stone 7 – so a lot of three-year-olds were put in here: 3-year-olds after 72 Cups, 3-year-olds had the best record – they won 23 Cups out of 72, because thrown in there were little light weights. Tulloch: what they did with Tulloch, he won the Derbies and he won the Caulfield Guineas and the Caulfield Cup – when he won the Caulfield Cup, instead of carrying 7 stone 6, weight-for-age, they gave him the full penalty, 10 pounds, in the Melbourne Cup.

Now if they'd given him half that, Tommy Smith might have started him but Haley, the owner, in the early part of it – at the beginning of this book, they quoted it in the *Winning Post*, actually, where I got provoked – the beginning of it, provoked – that paragraph there, I just used my own phraseology like 'some people have got mouths like the River Murray.' See 8 stone 2, it was doubtful. He won the Brisbane Cup in his last race, he beat a horse called Sharply, only just beat him. They say he never came back; he had a severe stomach illness when he was a three-year-old after he'd won the Caulfield Cup in Melbourne and he was out for about 12 months and they say he never came back. Well I say he did come back. I quoted the race that he came back in and he broke the record – a mile and a quarter. He did come back. So I question a lot of people when they make these statements: 'He was never the same horse as before.' I still say he wasn't a two-miler. Tails wasn't a two-miler, quite – a mile and three quarters. But he [Tulloch] finished up beating Sharply in the Brisbane Cup in his last race.

That's not bad for a come-back.

He's a wonderful horse, there's no doubt about it – the bastard nearly bit my head off!

Why, what did you do to it?

I went down to see him on the Friday, at Colin Hayes's stable he was, and there was nobody around. I thought I'd go and have a look at Tulloch before the Saturday and I couldn't see

him anywhere. There were horses lying out in the sand yards and I couldn't see any that looked like Tulloch, then I came to this box with two double doors, top and bottom, and I opened the door, the top door, and I'm not kidding you, Tulloch came at me, WHAAAAA! He missed my face by – could have got rid of my big nose. I was looking right down his throat, he had it right out like a lion. I'll never forget that, it nearly knocked the bloody door out of it and, of course, Johnson, his strapper, came around and oh, did he line me up – talk about me swearing – do you think he let me have it, both barrels. I said, 'Well, go on, let it all go – I'm wrong.' He said, 'What do you think you're bloody – doing,' – yelling his head off at me. I said, 'Well, it's a funny place. I wouldn't have thought you'd lock a horse up like that the day before the race,' but Tulloch, they all say he's good-tempered.

Not that day.

Well, I don't know the idea of it – they know what he was doing, he's a great horse but to lock him up all day in a – I suppose he went to sleep or, save his energy, whatever the reason. I can see his eyes now, Jesus!

We're running out of tape as you're saying goodbye to Tulloch, so we'll stop there for a while.

All right.

DISC 6 recorded on 8 May 2012

I just thought when we broke for lunch, it would be nice if we talked about some of the trainers, and the three big ones that come to mind for me are Colin Hayes, Tommy Smith and Bart Cummings. Would you like to talk about them – perhaps start with Colin Hayes because I know you had a bit to do with him, didn't you?

Well, Colin was a young chap who really came into the game through a toss of a coin.

How's that?

Had an old horse called Surefoot – he'd won the toss and got Surefoot and he ran third in the steeplechase and rode it himself, before he got married. He married a Miss Munro, Betty Munro – a charming woman. She recently died. And he had a great team – I don't know a

trainer who didn't have a good team. He had Speck Ryan, one of the famous Ryan brothers – there were five of them. Speck was the foreman for Colin Hayes and he had Jock Parks and his two boys – three boys, at Gawler, the stud property, and they went to Lindsay Park with him. So, he always had great horsemen behind him.

Colin Hayes really was a public relations officer with a charming way. He was a very likeable bloke to be with and I met up with him in about 1965 when Dad had a horse called Skymast with him. He always engaged the best jockeys – the thing with Colin, he got Bill Pyers from Bill Cutler. Bill Pyers was Cutler's apprentice and Colin Hayes got him over and he got Johnny Stocker from Bert Kenny; when he went to Melbourne he had Darren Gauci and [Brent] Thomson – the top apprentices in Melbourne. He always got the apprentice with claiming allowances – he always had the best riders, and I'll argue that riders are the keys to trainers. Riders ride the horses, they know the horses. Hayes has got the figures – over 5000 winners, which has got to say something, but I'm saying, if you look at it – if you look at Bart Cummings, Tommy Smith, John Hawkes, Colin Hayes and have a look at the horses that won and have a look at the riders that rode them – always the top, always the best jockeys.

As a race broadcaster, you know that a jockey can make a big big difference to a horse. There are horsemen and jockeys and there's a great gap between horsemen and jockeys. Horses travel well for horsemen; they don't travel as well for jockeys. A bloke like Pat Glennon was a horseman, hands and heels; Bill Pyers rode with a lot of zest; Jimmy Johnson used the whip a lot, used to almost kneel up on the horse's wither. I don't how he stayed there, he was a great rider, his figures prove that. But then you take the classic, like Neville Sellwood, he was killed in France, in the long run you get killed; Darren Beadman has just been seriously injured, looks as though he may never ride again – head injuries – wonderful brain, wonderful jockey. Horsemen: you can see the difference, see the horses – I've seen Pat Glennon go up to a horse that's supposed to be a bit of a mongrel to handle and he'll just touch it down the shoulder, and you can almost see the horse – 'ooo, this is good,' like a cat when you stroke it – they impart something to the horse.

Figures don't mean a lot to me – the thing is, Colin Hayes had a terrible lot of horses that didn't win. He didn't breed as many winners as you think up at Lindsay Park Stud. He got them from New Zealand; Bart Cummings got a lot of his top horses from New Zealand. They used to go up to Malcolm Wattke's place at Oakbank, Bart Cummings's horses – his agistment farm up there. Something with Malcolm Wattke, he turned just about all of Bart's Melbourne Cup winners, all spelled up here at Oakbank, at Malcolm Wattke's. It's good country – Tim's book, *the Blood the Soil the Gold*, talks about it: the Adelaide Hills, the Kentucky of Australia – a forgotten place. He's quite right – Balcrest Stud had so many great

horses: Coronation Boy and Shakuni – there's one combination, Shakuni/Charivari at Claude Haigh's place back in the early days: Charivari had 16 foals by Shakuni, they all won. I've got a picture of the grave of Shakuni and Charivari buried alongside each other – I've got it in my scrapbook – a remarkable record: 16 foals and 16 winners, and good winners, not country winners – good sprinting horses. But getting back to trainers - - -.

Didn't you work for Colin Hayes for a while?

Yes, I became his P.R. officer. I did his first two brochures for Lindsay Park Stud and I spent a lot of time at Colin Hayes's place. He wanted to launch me as a singer when I first met him. I went to one of his birthday parties and Sam Russo, an Italian [horse] owner, he was down there. I did Vesti La Giubba from Pagliacci, with a recording of Andre Kostelanetz – cheeky bloke, and I sang it very well that night, and Russo came over and said, 'You've got a bloody good voice there.' I said, 'It worked tonight,' because I was a happy soul, and he was going to launch me as a singer but I did his brochures and - - -.

Was he a good person to work for?

Yes, but he didn't – he didn't pay very much. I got \$400 for doing the brochure – there was a lot of work in that, the first one, but he always admired it. I did a brochure for Lindsay Park, for Carretta Park Stud in later years and Colin Hayes came – we'd fallen out by then – Colin Hayes came up and he said, 'Alf, did you have anything to do with that brochure that came from Carretta Park Stud?' I said, 'Yes, it's all my work, but they took my name off it.' He said, 'I knew, only you could come up with – you're very creative.'

How did you fall out with him?

We got on reasonably well together until there was trouble over a horse and I took it away from him – Skymast. I went down and put a halter on it and put it on the float and took it away and gave it to George MacDonald [trainer].

Why was that?

Well, the horse pulled up – he'd won four races straight and the fifth race, Johnny Stocker went to Melbourne with Bright Blend and so Des Coleman rode both Skymast and Prince Ming. Prince Ming won divisions of the same race in four races, together – they called them the twins. He [Skymast] came down with his head on the side and his mouth wide open and I went down to see him on the Sunday morning. I called the vet in, Peter Irwin, and I said, 'Have a look at Skymast, will you?' and he found two badly twisted teeth and wogs, a very bad attack of wogs, in the right ear, and I said to Peter, 'How long since you've seen him?' He

said, 'I haven't looked at Skymast for quite some months.' I said, 'Well, he sends us the bill for £31.10 every month, a vet bill.' So, I just took the horse away.

Then I took another – Dad owned a little horse called Tarompa. Dad was the first one to buy a syndicate share in Colin Hayes's set-up. He brought Romantic out here. It was one Sunday morning, he called me into the office, old T.H. McKay was in there with him and he said, 'Alf, what do you think of the idea, we're going to syndicate a stallion? We want to get some owners to buy syndicate shares.' He said, 'We're going over to get a horse called Fortino,' and I read all about Fortino and thought, gee, we're going to have to pay a lot of money for him. Well, they came back with Romantic, not Fortino. So I talked Dad into buying a share, so Dad had the first share in the first stallion at Lindsay Park Stud. I went with Colin the day he bought the property. I was on the verandah with Sir Keith Angas up at Angas's big home there, sitting on the front verandah when it was all done: £100,000 for Lindsay Park Stud.

Sir Keith had a son called Henry who wasn't interested in the horses at all, (?) one of those generations, and he decided to sell Lindsay Park Stud, and that was all done through two ladies playing golf – that's how Colin got to buy Lindsay Park: Helen Hill-Smith playing golf with Lady Angas. Lady Angas said – Helen told this herself at a wake of a death up there, at Angaston – she said, 'Lady Angas just said Sir Keith is talking about selling the property because Henry doesn't want it and he's buying him a property over at Birdwood, bought him 60 acres over at Birdwood.' He loved driving fast cars and skiing on the Murray, and so Helen Hill-Smith – they were to get in touch with – of course Windy, Windy [Wyndham Hill Smith], Windy was a big owner with Colin, and Windy got on to Colin Hayes and they got Jack Allison and Harry Cornell of Chrysler Motors in Mildura – he was the chairman; Ron Hutchinson, the jockey. I think there was a syndicate of about six top millionaires, formed the syndicate to buy Lindsay Park Stud. Jack Allison pulled out after a few months. Jack Allison is the uncle of Peter Andrews – you might have seen him on *Australian Story* with his property.

Yes I did, that was a good one.

Peter is a great mate of mine, Peter – very close friend, a down-to-earth bloke.

What about his son, Colin Hayes, what's he like as a trainer? David, sorry, David?

They followed through Colin Hayes – they still get the best riders. See, they've always got the best riders and that is the difference. They can talk to me until they're blue in the face: trainers, I know they put the show together but they've got a lot of people working for them – strappers, some of the girls, they use a lot of girls – they seem to be better with horses; even

women jockeys – horses respond to the way you treat them and I don't think a lot of horses like being stood over, they get sour. But Bart Cummings is the man I get on best with.

Tommy Smith, I met him, I interviewed him when he came over here with Tulloch. It was one of the best interviews I ever did – he was a very good talker and a nice little guy – can't knock his record, he's won the premiership in Sydney about 40 times, far more than Bart Cummings and Hayes, and his daughter is doing pretty well.

She certainly is.

Gai, she's a charmer, not that I know her very well but I just like everything she does.

She's got a great personality, hasn't she? Loves her horses.

Well, she loves the public and the public love her – she responds to reporters –

And she does work.

– She always looks happy and never knocks you back – you can't help but like her.

Tell me a bit about Bart Cummings.

Bart is one of those quiet achievers. It's hard to describe Bart, he's just a lovely bloke to be with – he's not a talker, unless you know what you're talking about. I've had some beautiful conversations with Bart because I always throw the ball in his court. I have a knack with talking to people – I throw the ball – he's the bloke – I'd rather him tell me than me pass my opinions about his horses. I've not had a lot to do with him, he's just one of the guys – I never used to hang around trainers and jockeys, I couldn't tell you who they were, I never knew them personally. I used to study colours, that was enough for me. I never did have a good memory for people's names, and I didn't want to – I didn't want to get involved. There was no way known people could involve me in being in rackets or party to corruption. I used to do my job, stay in my box all day, I'd go down to the jockeys' room to study colours, that's all – wouldn't say boo to a goose. Johnny Hawkes was a quiet little bloke, a very disciplined bloke. His father was a disciplinarian and he used to say with his boys, 'They're getting a bit cheekier now,' but he always called me Mr Gard, Johnny Hawkes, although I invited him to call me Alf. I said, 'My name is Alf, everybody knows me as Alf' – whoever I'm introduced to I say, 'My name's Alf, I don't respond to Mr Gard.' It sounds strange to me, I'm just Alf, call me Alfie and I'm happy –

Do you go to races at all these days?

– See, the thing is, I had a leaning towards – I had a great little mate lived just across Brighton Road, Tich Campbell. I used to go to his stables a lot, he only had four or five horses and they all were winners: Third Dimension and Wedding Wine – that was a great story, Wedding Wine – he was badly injured, he got down in the float and he split the inside of both hocks, each one, about that long [Alf demonstrates], and the wounds opened up like that. I had pictures of him, and the vets wanted to put him down. It was an awful thing to look at, the legs, when I went around to see Wedding Wine. He had been a good horse – Windy Hill-Smith owned him – he was a good miler. All the vets wanted to put him down but Tich wouldn't have a bar of it, so he put him down at a paddock at Myponga, and once a week I'd go down with Tich and I'd hold him while he just took the proud flesh off him in the paddock, week after week, and it gradually closed up until there were just scars, just behind the legs, just scars. He brought him back into training and all the people thought he was crazy. I knew he was a good horse, and I put it on television actually – I put the shots of the pictures of him as he was when he was hurt and when he finished up with these two long scars.

They put him in a mile race at Gawler first up and I was on the course broadcast and a field of about 12 horses started at the mile – Wedding Wine – they got going and Wedding Wine was tailed off, about 10 lengths last. They were strung up along the back of the course – 33/1, I think I put five quid on him at 33/1. Tich backed him and the stable boys backed him. I just didn't have the money to put more on him but I knew he had him right, he had him fit. And I'm on the course broadcast and when they were coming along the back of the course about five furlongs from home, he picked up the bridle and he closed the gap, right up behind them round near the turn, and he came around the home turn about four wide, into the straight, and he won by two lengths. Of course, I've got tears running down my bloody face, I could hardly call it, but the crowd roared when I said, 'Here it comes, Wedding Wine's picked up the bit, he's making his run now,' and the mob burst out laughing – they probably thought, 'Bloody old Alf Gard, he's going mad.'

It was one of the greatest days and, of course, I showed it on television and told the story. For weeks and weeks we went down there to do that horse. He was a lovely little bloke, Tich Campbell, a former jockey, jumps rider – just a humble little man on his own and had some good owners: won the Queen's Cup with Exaudi [1960]. When he said go – he was very unlucky, he should have won a fortune, he used to back his horse called Weatherly – he used to back his horses all up, he wasn't frightened to have a bet, but he just missed out on a fortune a couple of times, Tich, that much. He finally died.

I always had a leaning towards – I became friends with a chap named Vern Retzki, a Polish trainer, a big 22 stone, powerful man and a brilliant man with his hands. He could have been a doctor, could have been anything, Vern Retzki – a great great man – very very dear friend to Vern Retzki and Minna, his wife. I formed a very firm friendship. I used to go to his place quite a lot during those years of hardship and stay four and five days, and work up there cleaning out stables and getting around with the horses with Vern – and the Fausts, Norm Faust and Val, they lived at Woodside – they looked after me; had four kids. They all grew up with it all, little kids they were. I used to go and sleep on the floor – they'd climb all over me in the morning and young Mark Faust, he won the Great Eastern Steeplechase.

That's something we haven't talked about, is Oakbank. Did you call up there?

Oh yes. I started at Oakbank in 1958. I did the second call from 'the hill' from 1952 to '58: it was a two-way broadcast. There was a broadcast position on the steward's stand on what they called 'the hill' – the horses run behind it in about five of the races, they go behind the hill and the second commentator – they don't do it now because they've got television, and Terry McAuliffe calls it off television behind 'the hill' – only two furlongs. Yes, I worked with Jack Havey for five years and then I had about six different co-commentators after that – they picked them, I didn't. Noel Bailey picked them and fired them – they all blamed me, reckoned I was frightened of them: Harry Nicholson and John O'Neill and Ray Dugan. I know there were about five or six: Matt Fitzpatrick, Jack Rowe – I had to work with all these different blokes on 'the hill'. They didn't last long because the Club didn't think much of them. I know John Singer[?], in Port Pirie now, he doesn't think much – he reckons I got rid of him because he was too good. He's not, he's just a lousy broadcaster, he does his best at Port Pirie but he's just not up to it. I had nothing to do with it – I didn't hire him and I didn't fire him – I had nothing to do with it, Noel Bailey - - -.

It's always nice to blame someone else, isn't it?

It's terrible, when you cop the flak. I could have had a commentator, just the one, and we could work together. I had 20 different technicians; Joe Brown had one – and I had to put up with them. Some of them were funny little blokes that hated racing, hated going there. I had two blokes, John Davy and Mike Yates – I said, 'Look, just give me two, will you?' They did it for a while, then they'd go back to the old giving me Georgie Blackstock(?), Gill Harman – Gill Harman was a big bloke, 6 foot 5, big powerful fellow – he told me after he came to the races the first time, he said 'I was told, if I gave him any cheek, he was to hit me right there in the box.' I said, 'Well, you might have come off second best Gill.' I bought him a drink after

the races and said, 'I wish you'd put it in writing,' but he never would, he never would. His instructions were, if he got upset with me, hit me, so - - -.

There's a lot of controversy today about jumps races because horses get killed and the jumps have all been changed. What's your opinion on that?

I just love the jumps racing. They're exciting, the crowd love them, the public loves the jumps racing in the main. They don't go there – they're hunt people, the Hunt Club people love racing. The little show on television called the Saddle Club: little kids, and I mean little kids, I watched it last Sunday and there were three and four-year-olds on horses: they're jumping little fences, skipping over and the kid is just sitting on – they're not making the horse jump at all, it's like having a game with a mate. I've seen so many great horses, they put them over jumps before they race in the Melbourne Cup, like Van der Hum – six fences at Flemington on the morning of the race, and they take jumping – but stretching right out. It stretched the whole body – there's nothing like it in the morning when you get up: you can do all the exercise you like, but stretching, you can't beat stretching. I'm 90 and I'm still pretty loose-limbed because I work at it – you've got to keep the bastard moving. It's hard sometimes, it's hard. This morning I got up and I was running a little bit late and had a mate coming down to see me at 9 o'clock and I was racing against the clock which I hate doing - - -.

So, do you stretch every morning? Is that part of what you do?

Well, I was down getting my breakfast and I started to get these aches in the back and neck and thought, 'Geez, I don't feel too good today.' I nearly phoned Deb as a matter of fact to say, 'Can you cancel it?' I just felt lousy, and I had wind all night somehow, I'd had a boiled egg and I didn't sleep well, the bloody bed's a mess – it's all up in a heap. (Alf laughs) I just half prepared my breakfast, it's still half there on the plate, I just put a towel over the top of it.

I'd like to move away from racing for a little while, because I've got a few more questions I'd like to ask - - -.

Just to finish that - - -.

Yes, just finish that one.

Just to finish that, I just thought well bugger the breakfast, I'm not going to eat it anyway. So I thought, I'll go and do my exercises and I went back on the bed and I - - -.

What do you do, stretches?

Yes and – I spent about quarter of an hour - - -.

Well you're 30 years older than me and you're moving an awful lot better than I am.

I just, I thought there's only one way out of this – I've got to hit myself out of this somehow because I was just feeling lousy.

Well, it's worked.

When I'd finished, I got up and I was quite free again. The old body tightens up very quickly and I'd had a restless night, I hadn't slept all night – it wasn't the dog [Alf's neighbour owned a dog with a regular nocturnal barking problem], it was just, I just couldn't sleep, and that's what I was frightened of with this business.

We stirred up a few memories yesterday, so you would have been tossing them around a bit too.

We're all emotional.

Thank God we are.

We are very emotional people and it's something that I've been trying to forget and people plead with me to forget it all. It's all very well to say forget it, but when they're letting you hang – it's like Timothy with his Jockey Club – when they got rid of Tim at the Jockey Club: that was an inside job because people were frightened of him in there, and they finally got rid of him. Two or three years later, David Peacock, now the Chairman, came up to me at Victoria Park – be all of three or four years ago, no, it would be longer than that: it's twenty years since I've been to the bloody races. That's how long ago it is, since Peacock – that's how long ago it is. [Alf asks Deb]: When did Tim finish at the Jockey Club? Anyway, Peacock came up to me, he said, 'Alf, what's Tim's number?' and I gave him his number and I said, 'Why, what's doing, David?' He said, 'Well, we now know who was doing all the work,' meaning Timothy, which he was, doing about four jobs. He put in a submission to restructure the whole Jockey Club, which they did later. He gave them a submission – I've got a copy of his letter to [Brigadier Neil] Paramor to restructure it into four departments because he was doing all four. They were just overloading him and he couldn't handle it all. He was going 6 o'clock in the morning, he was going to work. You couldn't get a more dedicated bloke in the world than Tim. I know this, Peacock told me, but he has never phoned Tim. See, he's a little weak mongrel who's put me in a position now – I know that Tim was doing all the work, and I told David Coles, when he was chairman – I told him about Peacock. I said, 'You know now.' So there's Peacock and David Coles – 'Now we're three people who know Tim was doing all the work. When are you going to do something – compensate him?' He had his heart and soul in that Jockey Club. But no, here it is 15, 20

years later on. He's still not had the phone call. It just makes me so cross – I could go down and kill the bastard.

Well, I hope you don't.

It's on the cards that I will.

Well, I suggest you don't.

I don't care if it's on tape.

I don't want to have to visit you in jail.

I'm glad it's on tape – it's good.

I want to move completely and just ask a few general questions, but one thing that I do want to talk about, Deb's mentioned to me that Caruso had a big influence on you.

He did, yes.

Tell me about that.

Well, Caruso – Mum and Dad didn't hear them sing but Arthur Kingston Stewart, who coached Mum and Dad, were in the same company as Caruso and Dad and Mum ? all records back – they brought some records back of Galli-Curci and Caruso – Grand Forte, and I latched on to these, I've got them home now: Caruso, I love him singing The Lost Chord, Lolita – there was something about Caruso's voice, it was right down here [Alf demonstrates], almost as though he was singing – singing down there. A lot of tenors [Alf demonstrates a nasal voice], here, in the nose, and part of that is right, a humming into the nose, sort of thing, for top notes. I think I've been slightly wrong – it's a combination of the lot, but all based here [the diaphragm], and Caruso had this broad, different sound, and as a little boy as I grew up, I gradually – people told me my voice was like Caruso, and Arthur Kingston Stewart, when he came out here – it's not now, I've forgotten all that now. I'm putting it all together – it's too late though.

And I believe you have something that used to belong to Caruso.

A sword.

Tell me about the sword.

My father bought that off Enrico Regattieri – R-E-G-A-E – what is it? – the opera book, it's in the opera book.

We can find that later.

Regattieri, I just forget how to spell his name – he was a little tenor bloke who sang in the same company as Caruso, and they were good friends, and Caruso gave him this sword when he came out to Australia. He was the second tenor in the company that Mum and Dad had and they went to Perth. Dad was taken ill over there with a cold and Regattieri sang the roles when he came here, and he was a big gambler, and he used to gamble a lot on the train going backwards and forwards and he lost everything and Dad bought the sword off him there, so that's in a bank vault.

That would have to be a huge treasure in your life.

Yes, but I'd like to get some dough for it. I mean, it's not much good sitting where it is. Quite recently I phoned the South Australian [Opera Company]. They said, 'Oh Alf, if you think you're going to get a lot of money for that sword, have another think.' I said, 'I couldn't give a stuff about you people.' I said, 'I'm only offering it, first go.' I said, 'I don't want you people to have it because you – my mother and father did so much for this game when opera was opera – it no longer is, it's rubbish now to what it was. The singers are not there, I know the difference,' and I said, 'They should have been life members of the Opera Company – you should have been patronising them, they should have been front circle for what they did here.' I said, 'I don't even want to know you but I'm just giving you first offer. I'd like to see it on the wall at Her Majesty's Theatre – the first time opera was performed, my mother and father sang there, in this place. It would be a big drawcard. If you don't want it, that's OK,' but it's the way they spoke to me. I said, 'I'm just not interested, I've never been to your bloody opera; I don't go there anymore. I got so disgusted with what you didn't do for my mother and father – you just wiped them right out – read the book [*Through the Opera Glass*], you couldn't print the book without the book [scrapbook]; you asked me for their scrapbook, I gave it to you: you've used the pictures, you've used the stories – they kept it going right through, tried to keep it going until 1956, grand opera.' I said, 'I don't want to know you, I don't have to know you.'

Frankly I don't give a stuff about show business anymore. To me, it's a shit-pot game, mainly professional amateurs, that's the best I could describe them, to what they used to be. We haven't got singers here who can sing the lead roles – it's always the lead roles come from overseas. They couldn't put an opera on without half of Mum and Dad's studio – they'd ring up and say, 'Could we have Carol Kohler and Noel Robinson, Eric Pearce?' – to put their

operas on, they never had the singers. Mum and Dad should have been at the Elder Conservatorium all those years, not struggling away in a little studio in Paringa Buildings and Baptist Church building. They had the biggest singing studio here – they trained the first four News and Mail Aria winners. They said they're not going to call it the Gard/Thrush Annual – the year I sang in it, it was the fifth year and I did well in the semi-final but the ABC made me broadcast footy all the afternoon, the day of the final, and I finished up sixth. I was hoarse – Fred Williamson, the judge, he said, 'You would have been runner-up, you wouldn't have beaten Shirley Wilkinson, but you would have been runner-up; you didn't sing like you did in the semi-final. Why wouldn't the ABC let you off?' I said, 'They never gave me a go at anything.' Wouldn't matter what I did, they'd stop me. They could have got John Mahaffey in to do –

There would have been lots of people they could have done.

– They just put their foot on me – whatever I did: Bill White and Graham Taylor. They never called me in once – I had publicity, I had good press – never once did they acknowledge it to me, never.

We know what the public thought of you, and I think that's probably the best judge, isn't it?

Well as far as I'm concerned, that's so, but to me - - -.

It's poor when your employer can't acknowledge you. I've got a few summing up questions I'd like to put to you, which I put to most people I interview.

Yes

They're all hard questions, because I'm asking you to describe yourself.

That's all right.

What would be your greatest achievement in life?

Phew - - -.

I told you they were hard!

No, that's not hard – my greatest achievement in my life – by far is being a father of a lovely family. I'll always put that at the top, I think family is – the trouble is in my job being in the public so much, I was never home, so you get no choice: you want to please the public, you're never home, and you have to be committed to the public. I think getting above average in my Wing's Test was probably –

That's a good answer.

– as I say, I never did fly as well in England as I did in Australia and when I flew the conversion on the Hellcats, I nearly tore that plane in half over where Cairo is, because I just wanted to get out of what I was doing.

Now this next one, I think you've probably answered in the way you've talked about your life, but how would you like to be remembered?

Just as an ordinary guy.

I knew you would say that. I am getting to know you a little bit. If I had to go and say to someone this is how I would describe Alf Gard, how would you describe yourself?

Straight-shooting – I think Bradman put it in his reference, I was very proud of that – straight-shooter; never afraid to say what he thinks, and coming from Bradman, that'll do me.

Not a bad reference, is it?

And Canon Ray, he said, 'He's so honest,' how did he word it? I forget how he put it now – 'I suffer for being honest – but he has suffered from being honest.' That's not quite the way he put it but that was the meaning of it. Canon Ray taught me at Sunday School, where I was a little horror – I hated going to Sunday School and church – I was in the church choir. I just hate religion – destroys the world. And when I came to 14, I had confirmation in the church, he called me into the vestry and he said, 'I can't confirm you because you don't know your Ten Commandments off by heart.' I said, 'No, and I don't intend to because I know I couldn't keep them.' I was only a kid, 14, and I said, 'If anybody hurt my sister, I'd kill them, and if my sister was hungry, I'd steal.' I said, 'There goes two of them – but I can sum the Ten Commandments up in the best phrase ever uttered: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' I said, 'That's it in a nutshell.'

You've answered my very last question which is, what are the guiding principles of your life? I think you've just said it, haven't you?

Well that's it: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That covers the field.

And that's where we're going to stop because that's a perfect finish to describe your life. I'd like to put on the record, Alf, how much I've enjoyed talking to you. It's been an absolute pleasure to talk to you.

I'd like to put a return, thank you very much – you're very charming and a very very good interviewer, and you're very thorough in your preparation – and your preparation – you can't do anything unless you prepare for it.

I learnt that from you – your daughter told me that's how you learnt.

I want to put on tape how much I appreciate what Debbie's done, working with you.

Yes, it's been a pleasure for both of us.

I can see you both love your life in the library.

We do, and my hope is that a lot of people, not just racing people, but a lot of people from Adelaide come in and listen to these tapes.

I just hope that the follow up is not going to cause too much work.

No no, not at all. I'm actually hoping that this will create work – that some history students will come in and listen to this and go off and do some more work.

I'll leave it in your capable hands, dear.

Thank you very much.