

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

'Millers Point Oral History Project'

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Joe Fitzpatrick**

TAPE NUMBERS: MP-FH5 & 6 (2 Tapes)

INTERVIEWER: Frank HEIMANS

DATE AND PLACE: 21 July 2005 at Millers Point NSW

DURATION OF INTERVIEW: 78 mins 17 secs

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: Nil

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00:02 START OF TAPE MP-FH5: SIDE A

00:03 Tape Identification

Now just a bit of background about you, what is your full name?

00:36 Joseph Thomas Fitzpatrick. I grew up in Lithgow, my father was a signaller and I worked in the Post Office there, started there in 1947 when I was sixteen years of age, working on telegrams. Then about 1952 a mate of mine was going to get married and he wanted to teach me the Morse Code, so he taught me the Morse Code and he got twenty-five pounds for teaching me twenty-two and a half words per minute and I went into the training school. I started in the GPO in 1953 amongst all the Morse Code dots and dashes, circulating around the room, sending telegrams and receiving telegrams. I lived in 77 Victoria Street, Kings Cross and I used to write home to my parents and there used to be a newspaper called *The Truth* and this 77 Victoria Street was often mentioned in *The Truth* and my parents were wondering what sort of a place I was living at. It was condemned, there were alcoholic women there, and men, and I was a naive boy from the country and I didn't seem to realise what was going on.

01:52 At this time I was going through at the training school at Chief Parcels Office, just down from the railway station and for a whole year I learnt the Morse Code and then I went into the Operating Room at the GPO Telegraph Branch and started there in 1954. I had to leave this 77 Victoria Street, had to get away from Kings Cross, and I bumped into a mate of mine, I was meeting him on Saturday really, we were going to a Christmas in July at Crows Nest, anyway Bill Klein lived at 5 Lower Fort Street in The Rocks area, near the Harbour Bridge and I asked him if there was a room available. He said there was a room available, he told me next day, actually I had to share with two others, only a small room and there were three of us there. One of the chaps I was living with he jumped over the Harbour Bridge onto the cement path and he naturally killed himself, he was in the war and he came back mentally unfit, and I lived with him for a year.

02:59 After that we used to catch a tram from underneath the Bridge, the trams were running then for about another seven years, and I used to get a tram from just underneath the Bridge, it would let me off at the GPO and I'd have to Bundy on, you had those Bundy cards and you had to Bundy on and Bundy off when you knocked off work, so I worked amongst all these Morse Code keys and telegrams and also communications. I was one of the first blokes to do the switchboard, they had these Telex switchboards, and people

would call up on a Telex and you'd have to plug them through to another Telex number, it only started about 1958, this Telex business. Anyhow Bill Klein got me a room at 5 Lower Fort Street, which was handy to the GPO and I worked in the GPO for thirty-eight years but the Morse Code went out in 1961.

04:02 It was very interesting the people I met in The Rocks area at that time, that lived there prior to me living there, and they had a lot of interesting stories to tell. The Luck family, well Frank knew Molly Luck and there was two elderly ladies living in Lower Fort Street and they used to tell us a lot of interesting stories about the tough days and how the telegram messengers and postmen went around in pairs, and the policemen too. A lot of them worked on the wharves, like Tom Pearson down the road and Kevin Fitzgibbon who you interviewed earlier.

Can I take you right back a moment, back to your birth, which year were you born?

04:52 I was born in 1931 at Waverley and me father was working at Muswellbrook then, he had this job at Grass Tree Railway Siding. Me mother, her parents were Lebanese and my mother's eldest sister was born in Lebanon and they had a shop at Capertee, a general store, me grandfather was a hard working man. Their eldest son was almost born on the ship coming out from Lebanon. They had a general store and a silent picture theatre and it was very interesting for me in them days, they had the fruit shop and I used to go in and pinch grapes, or something like that. Me grandmother she could hardly speak English and she brought up all these children, me mother and she had five sisters and five brothers. Me father came from a little place called Wollara, just outside Mudgee and his father's, Uncle Keiron was the last man murdered by Jimmy Governor, Jimmy Governor the black feller married to a white murdered nine people around that time and hence the story of the *Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, the movie. I have read the book by Frank Clune and me Uncle Keiron Fitzpatrick, or my father's great-uncle, he was murdered in 1900 and the grave yard is still at Wollara, thirty miles outside of Mudgee and still well kept.

Interesting stuff. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, your mother was Lebanese and your father was from Ireland, was he?

06:49 Me father was on the railway and he worked at Capertee, a little village half way between Lithgow and Mudgee. Me grandfather, my mother's father, had this boarding house and they had about ten different people living in small flats and that, there were married couples. Me father took up residence there and he became very keen on me mother, me mother didn't actually want to marry him but anyhow, as it turned out they got married at

Capertee and me Uncle Ray was best man and that was about 1929, I was born in 1931 at Waverley. The Capertee cemetery was half full of my relatives.

07:48 Going back to Capertee, my mother's eldest sister Theresa was born in Lebanon and Uncle Charlie was almost born on the ship and then there were nine other children. Me grandmother used to always tell me that when she called out to her husband to come from tea he would be working from morning to night, he was one of them hard workers, but none of the children turned out that way, I'm afraid.

Now your father was a signalman on the railway wasn't he.

08:17 They wanted him to be stationmaster at Lithgow but me father never wanted promotion. He was very well educated, none of the children were like that, but there was one incident in Lithgow, I remember I was there, the Bob Dyer show came to Lithgow and me father was in the audience and it was a pretty packed house too, the Theatre Royale, and all these people around me father they were trying to get him to go up on stage, with Bob Dyer asking the questions but he wouldn't be in it, he'd had a few drinks but he was a very shy person. He used to read books whenever he was on the job in the signal box, during the idle moments, he'd read about two big books a day. I started work at the Post Office at Lithgow in 1947 and Tom Sewell was the postmaster there and my other brothers didn't have to look for work. Tom Sewell would say, 'When your brother Des leaves school we've got a job here as messenger for him,' the same with my brother Terry and the same with my brother Bernard, so we all worked in the Post Office at Lithgow at some stage.

You did a lot of different things as a child around there in those days. Tell me a bit about the war, do you remember the war years?

09:44 During the war years I lived at Zig Zag and all these railway trucks used to go through, they were loaded with bayonets, loaded with coal, loaded with a lot of wool, equipment, long trucks, some of the trains had about fifty trucks on them. The trains that came to Zig Zag, the goods trains, there'd be three engines, it was such a steep climb and winding. They'd have two engines on the front and the other one on the back, helping to push the train, little 26s they were, and once they got to Zig Zag the front engine would drop off onto the other line and the little engine at the back would keep pushing until the train got a go on again and they'd go through the ten tunnels. There were ten tunnels up at Zig Zag, they are still there, and they were long tunnels and it was quite an achievement, I'd say for the workers to make these tunnels possible for the trains to go through. Many a time I'd grab a trike of a weekend and I'd go through the tunnels on this tricycle and I used

to hear what sounded like trains, but they were really motorbikes going up the hill and I'd grab the trike and push it off the railway. But as far as the war years went me father was very busy. Only one of me uncles went through the war years, I missed out on training and none of me brothers went to war, or went in the Army. No, I don't remember too much about the war years except a lot of my mates and their fathers were part of the war years, but not I.

Tell me a bit about your schooling Joe, what kind of schools did you go to?

11:53 I went to St Patrick's Catholic School and there was a parish priest there when we were growing up, Father Patrick Whelan, he was there for twenty-five years, he used to visit the home. Me father didn't go to Mass too frequently, he'd always shoot through, I used to say, 'Father Whelan's on his way up,' and he'd go up the back passage and all that. With me school years I was hopeless at school, but we had the nuns and they were dressed in their habits then, you could only see their face, and some of these nuns were very harsh with the cane, they knew how to load the cane on, and I was one for getting the cane quite often, really. During me school years I was always down the scale a bit. I suppose I didn't learn much because living at Zig Zag too, for a good part of it, by the time you caught the paper train, number 9, into Lithgow and you walked to school and on the way home we used to walk home, about four miles along these winding rail tracks and by the time you got home you didn't feel like doing your homework.

Was that St Patrick's at Lithgow you went to school, was it?

13:14 Well, when we moved to Lithgow I was about thirteen then and I only had two years schooling to go, that was 1943 and only two more years for the war. When I was in Lithgow and I got up into the higher classes, first year and second year, and I'd like to say this part it was still full of those nuns that are still living. About two years ago I was asked to come to one of their socials and they weren't in their habits then, and they didn't look much older than me, in fact they were only about five years older than me when they were teaching me but they looked about twenty-five years older when they were in these habits. Me school years were a bit frightening in a way. I was good at marbles and stuff like that.
So how far did you go with school?

14:17 I only went as far as second year and I was sixteen when I left school. First of all I started off at Bracey's hardware shop for about six months and then they had me on the baker's cart for twelve months. I don't know how I saddled up the horse about three a.m. in the morning every morning and I'd have to load the baker's cart with all this bread, and

you'd have to know what people took, what sort of bread, there was the big loaf and the small loaf and all sorts of breads. For twelve months I had that.

15:02 Actually I did have an assistant and this assistant he said to me one day, 'There's a railway picnic on, why don't you go to it?' I said, 'All right, can you handle it on your own,' and he said yes. Next day when I went to work the boss, Bonnymead's the bakery, he said, 'You're sacked.' He had another mate of mine ready to take over, Harry Shepherd, and Harry realised then that the bloke tried to get me sacked so he could get the job, so he came home with me and he wouldn't go on the baker's cart. Anyway, I did that for twelve months delivering bread and I got the sack. Then I started off with the Post Office, a lot of these were blessings in disguise really, the way things happened, and after about twelve months there was a job going at Portland, so I went to Portland, this small little township not far from Capertee and Cullen Bullen and Ben Bullen and all those little townships on the way to Mudgee as the railway goes. Went back to Lithgow and then they sent me to Wallerawang, and I was there for about three months at Wallerawang and then they sent me back to Portland again. They wanted to know if I could ride a horse so I said I could, but I couldn't, so I got the job at Portland but I had to lead the horse around - I had some long walks there. When I started at the GPO I got a lot of jobs, I got Tamworth four times, I got Wollongong four times.

16:51 I went to Canberra in 1965, I was there for three months, came back to Sydney, went to Canberra again, came back to Sydney. Then they sent me to Goulburn, came back to Sydney, sent me to Canberra again, came back to Sydney, this is all in the late 1960s, then it was Wollongong. Because I was single a lot of my mates couldn't go away, they'd put in for the job and they'd get them and then their wives would talk them out of it and they'd call on me then, would I go to Wollongong, they sent me to Goulburn. Even had a little go at Dubbo for a while. So I was very lucky, getting relief jobs in the country. Finally when I got back to Sydney I was there for about the last ten years and then they finished me up in 1989, that is when telegrams came to a conclusion. So after 1989 I still had another seven years to go before I was sixty-five, so my brother Desmond was Postmaster down at Grosvenor Place Post Office, just near Circular Quay there, and he got me a job sorting mail to go into private boxes, so I did that for about five years until I turned sixty-five and after that well.

18:23 I was living where Frank lives, in 43 George Street North, they called it the Counting House, and that is how we come to get a Housing Commission place. We seemed

to be more than lucky as we went along. They were going to close 43 George Street North down after the landlady died, and she was about ninety-three, so after she died there was about ten of us all had to leave there at the one time. We had nowhere to go, they said we had to find our own place, but The Rocks Committee people, they always looked after people that had lived in The Rocks area for about thirty years or so and when they heard of it they decided to act on our behalf.

19:11 The Maritime Services Board that owned these houses, they came to some agreement and we all had to get together and they said they had found us Housing Commission places, as long as we went in pairs, so they left it to me to see who went with who. My room was on the same floor as Frank and we got on pretty well, both in the St Vincent de Paul Society, so I said I'd go with Frank. We have two elderly blokes just living down here where we keep an eye on them, next door there, and then another two just live further up the street and they still live there and the other couple they moved to the country.

Now Joe when did you first come to live in Millers Point?

19:57 I first come to live in Millers Point when I got the job at the GPO in 1954 and I lived at 5 Lower Fort Street for eighteen years, eighteen years I lived there.

Was it a boarding house?

20:13 Yes, it was a boarding house and it was a Mrs Culley running it, and she used to be a policewoman and she had this police baton, she used to work as a wardress out at Long Bay. Anyhow, one chap he came home a bit late one night and he got robbed and nobody would open the door for him at two a.m. so she got the baton and he pushed the door open and she nearly killed him. She showed me the clipping in the paper, she seemed to be proud of it, he ended up in hospital and he was there for about four weeks. Not so much from the attacker but from her, with this baton. That's right, he tried to break through her window, the chap that lived there. He was attacked in the park underneath the Harbour Bridge on his way home, he was coming home late at night and had had a few drinks and he got attacked and robbed.

21:28 When he came to, he was knocked unconscious, he was as frightened as anything and the bloke had taken everything out of his pocket, his wallet, his keys, and he tried to push one of the windows open and that was the landlady's room. She got this baton out and she nearly killed him, he ended up in hospital, more from her than the attacker.

What was her name, Joe, the landlady?

21:59 Eileen Culley was her name. There used to be a song, *Mrs O'Malley, Down in the Valley*, and she was always singing, 'Mrs Culley, down in the Gully'. She got on well with me and Billy Klein, but not so much the other tenants. I was the boy from the country and a bit green. That was number 5 Lower Fort Street and Frank lived in number 3 and that was in 1954. We used to see Frank toddle off to work and we'd say, 'Look at that long skinny streak,' he was very thin, 'heading for work.' It wasn't until fifteen years later I got to know Frank, in 1969.

Joe how many people were in this boarding house?

23:02 There was about ten. There was even a couple living down in the basement, you had to go down these narrow stairs. There was ten and Mrs Culley was the landlady and then about three or four years later Mrs O'Donnell took over, her and Jack. She separated from him and he died in a caravan, he was dead for about ten days before they found him. They separated and they had three children and the three children were all getting into trouble. Mrs O'Donnell and Jack. I got on pretty well with everyone. This Arthur Jamieson used to come home drunk a lot and they thought that he and I were very good friends and I was down in the basement one day and they said, 'That Arthur caused a bit of a nuisance last night,' and I said, 'Yes, he did,' and when I said he needed someone to talk to him Jack O'Donnell raced straight up and gave him a heck of a doing over, talking to him, he said, 'You'll be out soon. Good job you are a friend of Joe's otherwise you would have been out now.' So we had a mixture down there.

24:18 Most of them drinkers, we had Bill Ramsbottom, his name was Bill Ramsey as we knew him, and he got a job at the GPO, he was a first-class Morse operator. He said he came to Sydney with only one shilling in his pocket and I got him a room down there, when I got to know him at the GPO and it turned out that he was District Inspector at Bowen in Queensland and throughout the state. A chap came to Sydney once and he said, 'That bloke over there, he used to be a District Inspector in Queensland.' When I got to know Bill he went to see the Post and Telegraphs Manager, this bloke used to say, 'Bill, I've got your job.' His marriage broke up when his daughter married an American, this is during the war years, and he was fuming because she was going back to America to live and it broke up his marriage, and he threw in his job.

Those guys who lived in the boarding house with you were they mainly waterside workers? What was their main occupation?

25:27 There were a few waterside workers there, they worked on the wharves, just down below. There was some narrow steps that went down alongside 1 Lower Fort Street and there was all these ships at the back, we'd be hearing ship whistles all the time, cruise ships going out and all that. There were a lot of ships where these workers that lived in 5 Lower Fort Street worked, there was about four of them there, so they didn't have far to go to work. The landlord was one of them, Ken Crawford, well he was a deputy landlord for Mrs O'Donnell. I can say it now that he is dead, he used to steal a lot of stuff and so did the others too. That is why they brought in these big crates - there was so much stuff going missing on ships. We had a couple in our own house there.

26:26 Most of them were pretty hardy and they'd drink over at the Harbour View every night. There were about ten or twelve hotels around this area, the Liverpool Arms, the Lord Nelson, Harbour View, Captain Cook, one down the road here, so we had plenty of drinkers, I knew plenty of hard drinkers in them early years when I come to Sydney.
Did you drink a bit too, Joe?

Yes I ended up going with them too for somewhere to go. Living in a single room can be very lonely, so rather than be at home just on my own all the time I'd go and have a couple of drinks, I wasn't a solid drinker.

Tell me a bit about the pub culture, did each person have his own pub that he would frequent? Were they loyal to their pubs?

27:22 Yes. The fellows that lived at 5 Lower Fort Street, they were all loyal to the Mercantile Hotel or the Harbour View, which were the closest ones. When I lived at 43 George Street North there was the Observer, the Fortune of War, what is that one down at the bottom of Argyle Place, the Orient Hotel. There were about twelve hotels, there were a couple up here in Cumberland Street, the Australia, and I just forget the other one.
Did they each have their SP bookies?

28:21 Oh yes, and I was in that too, I used to have a bet every afternoon. They had a bookmaker at most pubs and I got to know most of them and you could tick up bets but by gee they'd come looking for you on pay day. When I worked in the GPO we used to get these telegram tips every Saturday and most of them were in code but we had two or three blokes in the room that could decode these messages and some of the tips were pretty reliable. In fact I wished they weren't really because when I started off so well it got me in and I gave it all back, plus plenty after a while.

29:11 We got a lot of overtime working in the GPO. When I first worked in the GPO

there were five hundred on the roster but you worked around the clock, the midnight to six - we had a meteorology section, there was a picturegram room, and we'd send pictures to Melbourne and Brisbane. I used to do it when I went to Canberra, you'd wrap a film around and it would spin around at so many revs per minute and after about ten minutes you'd have a picture on it. Quite a lot of them were going to newspapers, well the newspapers have got their own now but in the 1950s, like Melbourne Cup time and all that, we'd get all these pictures from Melbourne and they'd go to the *Sun* and the *Mirror*, there were afternoon papers running too, *Sun* and *Mirror* and morning *Telegraph* and *Herald*. So the GPO was quite a place when I first worked there. We had the picturegram room, the weather section, we had teleprints coming in where we had received from Melbourne and Brisbane and Perth and Adelaide, all single individual point-to-point bases. Then we had all these country ones like you'd have Lithgow and Mudgee and Dubbo and all over the place, Muswellbrook, Albury. That is another place I worked at too, Albury. It was like a beehive, the GPO.

30:58 END OF TAPE MP-FH5 SIDE A

30:59 START OF TAPE MP-FH5 SIDE B

Now Joe, going back to Millers Point again what was it like when you were living there, can you describe the community feeling that there was, how did people get on with each other at Millers Point in those days?

31:33 Well, when I first came to Millers Point I felt uneasy really, because the people had lived there nearly all their lives and I'm just coming down from a place like Lithgow where I didn't know too many at Lithgow and I hardly knew anyone when I came down here and I felt alone. Then one day this Bede Lakeney, wrote for the *Lithgow Mercury* and he spotted me and he said, 'Where do you live?' and I said, 'Lower Fort Street.' He said, 'Do you like it down here?' and I said, 'Oh the trams are very noisy, there are trams going over the Bridge and there are trams running both ways under the Bridge.' Anyhow, he put an article in the *Lithgow Mercury* that he had bumped in Joe Fitzpatrick who now lives at Millers Point and Joe wished that all the trams had tyres on them because they are so noisy. They seem to work into the early hours of the morning and he was a shift worker, working sometimes midnight to six and six a.m. to midday, that is how the rosters went and you had to Bundy on and sign the book if you wanted to swap. We are the only ones I know of that were

allowed to buy off. If I wanted to get off between, say, three and six of an afternoon I'd say get a bloke by the name of Ronald Boland to work me. As long as it went in the book Form PDF4 said 'Joe Fitzpatrick signed Ron Boland three to six,' that was okay.

33:13 I met a lot of tough guys when I first came to Millers Point but they seemed to have a lot of concern for the country boy come to the city and they'd tell you to watch out of this bloke, watch out for that bloke. But as I got to find out in time the blokes that I had to watch out for were the blokes that were telling me to watch out for this bloke and that bloke, they were sort of con artists. Then they'd borrow money off you and because you had so much confidence in them you'd think gee, at last I've met a good friend, but it wouldn't be that way - they were the ones that put it over you.

What sort of activities did you take part in, did you do anything with the community?

34:10 I played table tennis more than anything. I belonged to the Postal Institute and the halls weren't too far away from the GPO. I was also a chess player too, and through playing chess I used to find that Bill Klein could play chess, and Bill Chisholm. Through playing chess I got a trip to Perth in 1957 for two weeks, all expenses paid for, because I was in the Australian Postal Institute and you had to be selected for this chess game. Then in 1961 I got a trip to Hobart for free too, and that went for two weeks. Being a chess player, which I learnt at Lithgow with this Joe Daley, who somebody saw the other day, I haven't seen Joe for about fifty-four years. We heard this J A R Robinson was coming to Lithgow to be Postmaster and he was mad on chess, so I started to learn chess. When this Mr Robinson came to Lithgow I'd get a job at Portland and he'd be ringing me up, saying, 'Did you see the chess problem in the *Herald* on Sunday, can you work that one out?' and half the time I could and half the time he could and we had that good communication there.

35:30 But with chess, I also got a job, like when these special jobs cropped up, like at the Menzies Hotel all the top chess players that I used to read about in the papers, C J S Purdy and Gregory Kosniski, John Purdy, all these blokes, they had this chess down at the Menzies and there were twenty players in New South Wales playing twenty players in Victoria and I was the Morse Code operator and it was 1957 or 1958. To my amazement the television crew came in and they started taking television - television had only just come in at this time too, anyway they took pictures of me sending the Morse Code. Then it went on the big screen too, they had these newsreels - newsreels used to go about every week - and there I was, all on me own on the great big screen and a mate of mine saw it in Perth and he sent me a telegram and he said, 'If there is anything that you ain't that's it', he didn't think

much of me as a Morse Code operator. So through chess I ended up getting all the chess jobs that were going, there were plenty of them going over about eight years and I used to get all these jobs. There was another one just up here in Kent Street at one of the halls there and I was the main operator there, it was all the teleprinter then, Morse Code was out. So through chess and through table tennis.

37:21 With table tennis, they had this Australian Postal Institute and for twenty years you could get a fortnight off work to attend these carnivals because, as I said, there were five hundred on the roster and we had plenty of workers and it wasn't hard to take a week off without pay and a week with full pay out of your holidays. So all these big places, like one year it was Albury and then it would be Wollongong and then it would be Tamworth, they'd go from one town to another. So I felt that kept me going over the years, like all the holidays I had through playing table tennis and also playing chess.

38:07 The Postal Institute was a wonderful organisation because they'd have all these dance turnouts and sporting carnivals and sporting activities and I used to collect for the Postal Institute on the fourth floor, I think there was about eighty on my books. All that money would go to the Postal Institute but I got out of work that way, every payday they'd let me off for about three hours to go and collect for this and collect for that.

Now coming back to Millers Point again and the house you lived in, the boarding house, how many floors was this house?

38:51 Well in the first place it was only a room and it was pretty lonely of a night time, but then again I used to come home pretty tired. You'd get about two hours overtime every day at work and after you'd have your meal at the Catholic Club or the GPO cafeteria. We had a few drinkers in these boarding houses too, and unless you were a reader, I wasn't really a reader, I used to like listening to the radio and things like that, things could become a bit boring and lonely and that. Then you'd have a good night's sleep and you'd wake up in the morning and you'd get on some pretty hard Morse Code lines at times, there were some very quick operators. I was only good on the Morse Code if they didn't break up words, like they'd break up a word like 'congratulations', they'd say 'congrats' but you had to put in full on the telegram form when you were taking these telegrams.

40:00 Getting back to Millers Point and the boarding houses, I got to know so many people that lived on this side of me like Kevin Fitzgibbon, who you interviewed there and also Margaret Anderson, she was only six years old when she lived next door to me and I was about twenty-three then. Margaret is married now and lives in the next room there

and I collect their mail when they go away for a week or two. So from a shared room with two other people then it became a shared room with one. Then my brother Des came down to go through the Morse Code training school too, so he stayed down there. Quite a few of my mates stayed down there too, they were looking for rooms and I found them rooms down at 5 Lower Fort Street. They wouldn't have far to go to work, they'd get the bus after the trams and all that. So I wasn't really lonely, I suppose, after the first two years. *Well you had lots of people in the boarding house you must have got to know, did you?*

41:14 Well with the boarding house the landlord used to keep you on your toes a bit. Kent Crawford he used to always be checking on the lights. There was a bloke in the next room to me, a Bede Beadman, he still lives down here, we used to play cribbage and we'd play for about five cents a hole and we'd play until one or two a.m. in the morning and my brother Des would be in it too. The landlord would be coming up knocking on the door and he was always complaining to the landlady and the landlady in the finish said, 'Let them be.' They were very tight-fisted with their money. I had a lot of interests, I suppose, I had cribbage, I had chess, draughts, now I play cards three nights a week.

You keep yourself busy, that is good. How much rent were you paying for your room, do you remember?

42:08 When I first went to 5 Lower Fort Street one guinea, one pound one shilling a week, room only. Then after that it was twenty-five shillings a week and I think it stayed at that for the eighteen years I was there after that. Then when I went to 43 George Street North that was very cheap because the landlady was very reasonable. She was about eighty years of age when I went there and all she wanted was good tenants. She had a son who was a dental mechanic and he had his practice on the ground floor too. He worked at the Dental Hospital, near Central Railway but he also had a practice and he looked after people from The Rocks area. I remember one time a nun came there and she wanted her teeth done and he was pretty full, he used to drink this wine and that, but he always did a perfect job, anyhow she said, 'How much will that be, Russell?' and he said, 'Just say a few prayers for me,' so that was her fee.

43:25 It was much better when I went to 43 George Street North, Frank was living there and we had this table outside with the electric jug and a toaster and you could always make toast or have a cup of tea of an evening and have a bit of a chat. I didn't have an FM radio then and Frank was telling me about this country music show I used to like, so I went and bought an FM radio and I joined the 2SER Radio Station. This Maurie Taylor that was

running it I rung him up one morning and I said, 'Do you want any help in there. I work at the GPO and you are only up the road from there.' He said, 'Oh, you can come in and answer the phones if you like.' I never ever thought that I'd end up on radio. He was an alcoholic by the way. So after about four or five years Brian Haddow was doing the job then and he said, 'About time you blokes' - me and Bill Hanks - 'started learning the panel and doing a program,' because it was seven days a week, four hours. I wasn't in favour of it at all but I said, 'All right I'll give it a go,' so I ended up doing it for fourteen years. There was one week there I did five days out of eight and I was working at Wollongong then too and I was getting bad with the bosses because I'd catch a train and I'd be an hour late.

Were you announcing on the radio?

45:03 Yes I was announcing the records and we'd get plenty of requests, I have got one of me tapes in there now. I suppose we had about two thousand long play records, we had plenty of 78s, you'd play 78s in the station and 45s and little EPs, 33^{1/3}. I was good at answering the phone because every night, when I did six to midnight, I would work in the phonogram section between 9.30 and midnight, and you'd be taking mostly overseas telegrams but I was pretty good on the telephone. Once I had a new set on I could hear well and me typing, well after the years typing was pretty proficient. I have got a typewriter over there, another electric typewriter down there and I've been doing a lot of typing here this morning. I belong to Bankstown City Radio but it is just a bit too far out of my reach to be going out there, I have been out there but it is just a bit too far away.

Now the people at Millers Point - were they mainly Australians or did you have Chinese or Italians as well?

46:21 It was half and half really. A fellow over at our place, [????], he was Dutch, Frank Lowry came from England, they both live down here. Johannes [????] he was Dutch too. Then at Mr Dawkinson's place, there were two or three Chinese, we didn't get to meet them. Yes we had all nationalities. Down at Lower Fort Street one of the chaps was a seaman and he'd been to all these countries, Bill Chisholm, I just don't know what nationality he was but his brother was a captain on a ship for a lot of years. Anyhow, as far as nationalities go it was quite a mixture. When I went to 5 Lower Fort Street most of them were English.

How did the different religions get on with each other?

47:38 Well it seemed to me that most of them were Catholics where I ended up, maybe it just happened that way. Myself and Bill Klein, when he introduced me to 5 Lower Fort

Street, even the O'Donnells, but they were Communist, very strict Communists, and they were agitators too, whenever there were strikes in the city they'd be amongst the leading groups with their microphones. So we had these Communist people at 5 Lower Fort Street for a lot of years and when there was trouble with the ships and all that with Ken Crawford they were very active in disrupting things.

Are you talking about the waterside workers?

The waterside workers on this occasion.

How were they looked upon by the people of Millers Point?

48:33 They didn't seem to mix too much with anyone. They were also landlords and having about ten different people in ten different rooms. They also had three children too, Jack and Ivy O'Donnell, and bringing up the children in that environment they used to get into a bit of strife and the police would come now and then. The boy, he got into a lot of trouble when he turned about fifteen, sixteen. Apart from that everyone seemed to keep to themselves in a way, once they went inside their room they stayed there. We only had the two bathrooms, one downstairs and one way down in the basement, and I know me brother Des spent a lot of time in the bathroom and this Bill Ramsey was always saying, 'How much longer are you going to be in there?' because Bill was one of these blokes that was very punctual at work.

49:41 I was lucky, I used to get a lot of hard Morse Code lines, you'd have about six different Morse lines, like I might have, say, Portland, Mudjee, Kandos, Rylstone all in the one set up and you'd call them up individually and you'd tell them, 'If you have got any messages go ahead, 'GA, go ahead.' Then at the finish you'd acknowledge that you had received these messages. The person in Sydney was the controller, he took all the telegrams. Once I took a telegram you'd throw it on the conveyor belt and it would float down and go onto another conveyor belt and then it would glide along and then on a high conveyor belt, there were that many conveyor belts in the room with telegrams floating on them.

50:31 Then we had all these press telegrams and I used to take all these overseas messages via phone and you had these teleprinters, they were pretty modern ones, and I could put ninety-six overseas messages on the one printer. It would come up on a screen and if say 'Italy' the teleprinter was switched off and when they switched it back on again it would automatically keep trying to get through. So having an interesting job like that and living in a place that was convenient to me, a lot of people had to come in on trains from

Liverpool and Penrith and Parramatta and they'd be late for work if the trains weren't on time, or if there were strikes, I was always there. I had no excuses for missing work any day because I lived so handily.

Now this is at the GPO, isn't it?

51:39 That was at the GPO. I didn't use much of sick leave, I left about a year and a half sick leave in, whereas everybody else was using up all their sick leave. They'd get all these half days and they'd get that converted to full pay, so that they'd be using it up too. I was trying to use some of my sick days up before I retired but there were too many blokes using theirs up, so living so close up I still went to work.

I believe you had something to do with the Queen's visit.

52:09 Yes, when the Queen came out here in the 1950s I got the job at the Menzies Hotel. A bloke by the name of Tony Eggleton, he was pretty well-known in them years, he was an MP, connected with Parliament House and all that, anyhow he saw that I was well-fed and well looked after. He was sort of in charge of proceedings and that, so they were based at the Menzies Hotel near Wynyard, Carrington Street, and there I was with the teleprinter in front of me and then they'd hand me messages. Different reporters from England, they'd come across and they'd say, 'Would you send this message,' here there and everywhere.

53:00 When I went to Bathurst in 1956 the cricket team from England came over. I used to follow the cricket then and there was this Dennis Compton, he was opening batsman for England, very prominent in them early years, but by this time he was a reporter for the cricket. The cricket team, they came to Bathurst and they played Western Districts and I worked until midnight that night. Anyhow, Dennis Compton he came along very drunk, about eight o'clock, he rang me up and said, 'I've got a lot of press telegrams to go back to England,' I said, 'Well come around to the post office at Bathurst, come around to the side and I'll let you in.' When he went upstairs and he saw all the telegrams that were to go ahead of his he asked me as a favour would I send all his press messages first and I said, 'Well seeing that I've met you and shook your hand and I have followed you in your cricket matches and all that,' so I did that for him. So I met Dennis Compton. I met a lot of people through sports and that and getting these jobs.

I used to get jobs all over the place but the knew I was reliable. I was one of those chaps that was frightened of bosses and we had a lot of bosses in the GPO.

Now you were living in two different boarding houses all the time you lived in Millers Point?

54:30 Even when I first came to Sydney I lived in Victoria Street, well me uncles lived up in Kings Cross all their lives. Me uncle, he was a card croupier, he used to work from midnight to six, dealing out cards and playing with dice and stuff like that. I wanted to be near me uncles, there were about three of them, all living at Kings Cross.

Can you tell me something about the shops in the area, what sort of shops there were?

55:07 There is not too many shops. When I lived in Lower Fort Street there was always the Lebanese store at Lower Fort Street, that is the only shop I can place, and they are still there and they sell vegetables and fruit and all that. In later years, being in St Vincent de Paul we have contact with them and we write out food vouchers for people, well the church does, anyone that wants a drink of lemonade and a sandwich, they write out these six dollar vouchers and they hand them into the shops and we pay the shops with St Vincent de Paul poor box money. I got to know these Lebanese people over the years, Joe Wassaf was the name of the person that had it for many years, I believe he is still alive but his children and grandchildren now run the place. They have done very well with the local people, being the only shop in the area. I used to go there meself and so did me friends for a packet of cigarettes, or if they wanted small items like biscuits and that because where we lived we only had electric jugs and that outside our door to make a cup of tea.

What about a butcher, was there a butcher around?

56:30 Yes, Don Parrish, who only finished up about four years ago. He drinks at the hotel at the Captain Cook every evening, very popular bloke and he sold very good meat. His assistant, Bill Galloway, belongs to the Centre, he has been a pretty sick person. The butcher's shop was just across the road from us and always had good meat and he'd cut it in front of you and gave you a good go. Don Parrish had that all the years I have lived here, the last fifteen years that I have been here. So we've been lucky with butchers' shops, general stores. Not too many shops really in Millers Point, though we've just had one open up recently, the convenience shop, it is open from about six o'clock in the morning until midnight. People come in spasmodically but he does very good business over the period of a whole day, if you want milk or bread late at night or anything, just round the corner.

Now Joe, you said when you came here you felt that you didn't really belong because you were just like a blow-in, now you have been here about fifty years - how do you feel now?

57:56 I felt out of place really. I didn't see too much of the people because I worked round the clock. Once you left home and you got in a bus to go to your work at the GPO, well they used to have me starting about eight o'clock in the morning. They had this syndicate at

work and a lot of the chaps at the GPO were working two jobs and they'd ask me, seeing that I lived close, would I work to nine o'clock at night. By nine o'clock somebody else would come along and say, 'Oh gee, I can't work any longer - can you do another three hours?' I used to do that about three nights a week, I'd start at nine o'clock in the morning and go to midnight. I don't know what happened to all my money, I flitted through it, but it was always there. You weren't taxed on the money that they paid you, it was an arrangement that you put it in the book and they'd pay you ten dollars an hour. Once I left home I mightn't see me home until midnight that night and you didn't meet any people, I was sort of separated from them that way.

59:22 END OF TAPE MP-FH5 SIDE B

00:05 START OF TAPE MP-FH6 SIDE A

Joe, tell me a bit about your work with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

00:17 When I came to Sydney me brother Desmond became a member of the Aquinas Academy, Thomas Aquinas was a genius in his own right, anyhow Des joined the St Vincent de Paul Society at St Patrick's in the city and for about six years he tried to get me to become a member. Because of my work at the GPO and because I wanted to be playing snooker and billiards and cards and all that I ended up saying no every time and one year to my surprise I said, 'Yes, okay I'll come along to the meeting.' Once I went to the first meeting well I went to everyone after that. At this time Frank became a member too, the same year, 1969.

01:08 Now we had fourteen members to begin with and we used to visit in pairs and every week we'd be allotted, say, two persons. Mr and Mrs Luck, Molly Luck, down at Lower Fort Street, they wanted just a friendly visit and they'd make you a cup of tea and quite often they'd invite you for a meal and talk about the earlier days in The Rocks and we'd hear a lot of interesting stories that way. The people started dwindling down then, most of our members lived on the North Shore but they used to work in town and we'd have a meeting. Going about ten years or so it dwindled down to about four members and instead of visiting in pairs, well, we still did that, we seemed to have more people to visit and more people who needed help. There were so many people moving in from the outer Sydney

area to the inner city area - it is nearly all Housing in this area now - so I get calls every afternoon at three-thirty on the phone from Cleveland Street to visit Mr and Mrs Jack Gibson of High Street, or Windmill Street, Dalgety Place, Merriman Street, so you do your visits in the late afternoon.

02:34 I worked in Canberra in 1974, came back the day Gough Whitlam got ousted, the same day in 1975, the eleventh of the eleventh. I went to the meeting and there was the President from the St Vincent de Paul Society's head office and he was there to install me as President, that was 1975. You are supposed to be President for only three years, so I should have been out in 1978. All right, I took it all calmly and I became President and if I last until November this year it will be thirty years as President and I have been very busy, I write out vouchers just about every day of the week. So that is thirty years as President, so it worries me that when I finish up there will be nobody to take over because everyone lives out of town and it is just breaking away. We are the only two that live in the area now, the other two members, they live out at Burwood and out of town.

03:47 It has been interesting visiting these people, a lot of these people, they don't have anyone else their homes, they are loners. We have had three lots of people - can't mention their names - where the police have been called so often and they have been banned from the area for two years and been a real nuisance. Anyhow, as far as we are concerned we are invited into their place, we seem to find them a bit different to the people that they really are, they change their colours when we visit them because they want help. They want help with food, we have electricity vouchers to give them, we have gas vouchers to give them and now we also have Telstra dockets to give them.

04:31 A Telstra docket, that takes twenty-five dollars off their bill, if you give them two that is fifty, and with the gas and electricity they are twenty-five dollar vouchers too, so they are helped in a lot of ways. Like that lady that just knocked on our door a little while ago wanting a refrigerator - we can get them a refrigerator every now and then. Then they want furniture, people move into the area and they want table and chairs, single bed and mattress, so I am able to, with the aid of this book, write out the voucher and they go out to Cleveland Street where they have the big shop out there which is loaded with single beds, mattresses, chairs and tables and clothing and all sorts of things.

Do you decide who gets the welfare?

05:25 I do. We are supposed to all have a say in it but usually it is me, because we visit them, so I usually do have the say. Sometimes I get criticised because we had a Sister,

Gemma Pearson, and she has lived in the area all her life, she knows all the people, and is still very active. She knows what type of people they are.

Joe what sort of help is there for the older people in the community?

05:58 Well, we have the Millers Point Pensioners' Group and the Pensioners' Centre and it is just near the post office there and Frank and meself belong to that centre. At twelve o'clock every day we get these meals, you line up and they have a different meal each day of the week. After the meal quite often they have a bus trip - now tomorrow it is an all-day bus trip to Windsor for the day, so they have their meals out at Windsor, maybe in a park or somewhere like that, and then the bus will take them around. The community bus will take about fourteen of them to other areas, just passing through remote towns and all that, and they bring you back about four o'clock of a Friday. After they have had their meal at twelve o'clock, at one o'clock or one-thirty the bus leaves and this happens one day a week. They have the shopping buses too for these people and they go to Leichhardt and they go to Marrickville. People do their shopping for about an hour and a half or so and the bus brings them back and drops them right at their door with all the foodstuff that they've bought, and whatever they have bought at Bi-Lo's or Clancy's, Franklin's, whatever it is.

07:18 So the people in Millers Point I feel are very fortunate that they have got this centre because you can even do your washing around there, they've got shower rooms. For those that want to play chess, well they have got like a snooker table, as I said, and then they've got this radio, and they've also got a library room. People get on generally well with one another and it is open from about ten o'clock until four o'clock every day, Monday to Friday.

Who runs this place?

07:54 It is run by a couple of long-time residents in the area, Lana McCann, she has been a spokesman for Millers Point for a lot of years. A couple of times on television I have seen her without knowing she was going to be on but because she is very knowledgeable and lived in the area all her life people have got wind of whom to visit and ask questions and she seems to have all the answers about Millers Point and The Rocks area. She must be about seventy-five I suppose. Anyhow, she belongs to the Millers Point Pensioners' Group also and she is quite a good spokeswoman and full of ideas of what improvements should be made to the centre. She is also very helpful to the elderly people that might need advice on housing and where to go to make complaints for your water leaking, or pipes broken and things like that, some parts of the house that needs repairing, or roof leaking.

09:03 The people in Millers Point, once they have lived here a few years, if they are in doubt about anything there is always a few people around at the Millers Point Pensioners' Group, Centre, that have answers, they know where to go to, a certain place at the Town Hall if you want parking tickets and all that. If you want a resident's parking ticket you go to the Town Hall and every year you put your name down, and for a pensioner it is about two dollars, or maybe ten dollars. They seem to have all the answers and everyone seems to be helpful in this area. There is only six hundred people in the area and it is all Housing.

How do you feel about the new development that is planned when Patricks leaves the wharves, they are going to be putting up huge blocks of office buildings and so on.

10:00 Yes, a lot of people are concerned about these new buildings that go up, the views that are lost. It seems to be a backward step over the years with these improvements, as they call them, and there will be buildings all over the place if they actually get away with it. There is always a lot of protesters but every now and then a building goes up and it seems as though every effort has been made to stop that building going up, but somewhere along the line they have lost touch and they have got away with it. Since I've moved down here in fifty years there haven't been too many buildings gone up.

The Rocks hasn't changed too much, only the people, but so many of these people have come in from the outer cities. When I first moved in here all The Rocks people, they seemed to have lived here for years, no additions, and everyone knew one another and you felt safe.

You don't feel safe now?

11:05 No, not so much. We get a lot of visitors of a Friday night visiting the hotels and a lot of them decided to go on pub crawls, and when they go on these pub crawls you hear them down the street, noisy and kicking whatever might be in sight, might be a garbage can, they have got to make a nuisance of themselves. Friday and Saturday nights, especially Friday night, can be pretty vile down here in The Rocks area, actually it is a good time to stay indoors really, for the residents.

Is there more crime than there used to be or less?

11:48 I wouldn't say there was too much crime, you don't hear of too much down here. We have had a few troublesome people in these Housing Commission places when they have moved here from the outer suburbs but after a while they quieten down because The Rocks people and the people that have lived here for a long time, they start letting them know, so they adjust to our way of life. No, I would say there is not much crime at all, I

would say it would be the best suburb in Sydney for less crime.

What do you like about Millers Point, Joe?

12:31 Well, I like the people. Being in the St Vincent de Paul Society too, you get to know the people, they seem to confide in you, they tell you their problems, they tell where they come from, their marriage break-ups. Like the lady just up the road here - her daughter just wanted to use the phone - comes from El Salvador. Twelve years ago her husband brought her out here from El Salvador and left her and the daughter, who was about six years old then, and shot through and hasn't seen them since. There have been a few stories along them lines, so quite a lot of mothers and daughters, growing up in a place. This lady from El Salvador, she sends money home, it is a very, very poor country, and she works in a nursing home and half her pay seems to go to El Salvador to her relatives and friends.

We get all kinds of people now from everywhere.

Yes, a lot of different nationalities are in this area.

What is your best memory in Millers Point?

13:45 Well, me best memories are of when I lived at Lower Fort Street and it was a novelty for me, coming from a quiet town, a coal mining town of Lithgow. A dirty and dusty town, full of mines, coming to a place that is fairly clean with ships blowing their whistles and trains going over the Bridge, taxis and cars running everywhere. The novelty of Millers Point and all the hotels and the people you meet that worked on the ships and the stories that they told. Some of the toughies that I met in the 1950s when I first came to Sydney, they looked at me as a chap that was really green, coming from the country and not knowing very much, it all seemed to be an education for me. Somehow I seemed to get on well with these tough people, they saw something in me and I made a lot of friends around here. Probably more friends than I wanted to because there are a lot of people that want to bite you for money, like two of them this morning, it cost me five dollars to get past two of them, you know ten dollars. Sometimes you get some of the money back on their pay day but you only get half of it back.

You are a Good Samaritan, I think. Are you a religious man Joe?

15:20 No, not very religious but I try to be. Being in the St Vincent de Paul Society you are supposed to create a good image, an image of being good and giving, and all that, and people get to know you that way. I suppose I am fortunate enough that I can write out food vouchers very freely. Like just recently a lady moved in right next door to us, two months ago, I called into her place this morning and she is in a lot of debt and anyway, I gave her a

thirty dollar food voucher and she thought it was wonderful. She hasn't got herself right yet, I don't know much about, she is sixty years of age. I was told to get others to visit her, we didn't want her knowing that she was living right next door to a St Vincent de Paul crowd, but one day I was on the back steps and she was on the back steps and she knew that I'd visited her, so the game is up now, but anyhow in her goodness she has made us a couple of meals. She has got this daughter and she is looking after the daughter's baby quite often.

16:43 So we have built up a lot of good friendships with people like that in the area and we have made them feel confident and because we've given them vouchers that helps them to pay other bills. She says she was just alarmed yesterday at some of the bills that came in, what she has got to pay, and she had very little to even buy food and I just took it in me head that she probably does need another food voucher and I just knocked on the door and gave it to her and she said, 'Come in, best thing that could have happened to me today.' So we have helped a lot of people out like that, really.

That is nice. Joe what do you think is the future of Millers Point?

17:34 Well, I sometimes fear the day when we are going to be hoisted out, or they are going to put buildings up, but then again we might see it through. The future of Millers Point - I wouldn't like to see too many changes. It hasn't changed too much over the years that I have been here, it always seems to be the same and no change, but so far so good. It has always been so handy to the city and to the workforce, people who have to go to work, they don't have far to go. They get their bus, maybe from Town Hall or Wynyard and they are home for their evening meal and they are home to watch television until the next morning when they've got to go to work again. The fact that they work in the city, like I did at the GPO for those thirty-five years, most days I'd walk to work, no fares, and walk home, that might be coming to an end for a lot of people but I struck it pretty good anyhow.

Thanks very much Joe, that is a good note to finish our interview on.

16:57 END OF INTERVIEW WITH JOE FITZPATRICK AND END OF TAPE MP-FH6 SIDE A.