

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE MARSDEN

recorded by

ALEXANDRA MARSDEN AND SUSAN MARSDEN

on 28th December 1991

Recording time – 58 minutes

Note: All questions are shown in bold, there is no differentiation between the two sisters.

Bruce Marsden

28th December 1991. The following is an interview with Bruce Cecil Marsden of Goodwood, South Australia by his daughters Alexandra Marsden and Susan Marsden.

Try that again. What was it?

417390

That was your?

Airforce number.

Was it, don't know how on earth you managed to remember. You don't have to go through it dad, I'll start off (laughs), just don't point the microphone at him and say go for it. What we are going to do today is first just have a brief chronology so that we can get our dates fixed, and overview, and secondly to have a quick discussion of the themes of what we thought we'd like to tackle and have a look at what we want to discuss. The first thing, which is the childhood theme, we'll just run through that.

First or second?

The first childhood, the second childhood, interestingly enough is in theme number four which is growing older. First of all, dad from you I need a brief chronology. Could you tell us when you were born and where?

Camberwell Road, Hawthorn, Melbourne, Victoria.

At home?

I don't think so, I don't know.

When, what year?

13th May 1923.

Was the family actually living in Melbourne at that stage or where they just drifting?

Living, dad was practising in Melbourne.

Whereabouts?

Hawthorn, probably from home, I don't know, I don't remember.

You were there. Do you know how long you were in Hawthorn, your family was in Hawthorn?

We moved to Adelaide when I was two and a half so I think we were only in Hawthorn for that time. They might have been there before but I don't recall.

Whereabouts in Adelaide did you move to?

Henley Beach Road, Torrensville.

And your father was practising there?

At the house, yes.

As a general ---?

GP.

You were the last child of five children?

Yes, sir.

Now you were in Adelaide until when? When did they move to the country?

Good question. I think when I was about six, no before that, they moved to McLaren Vale. I don't remember any of that. Probably a good time to say that I'm not one of those people who subscribe to the theory that everybody remembers what happens to them from when they first opened their eyes in the delivery room, I often think that I don't really remember anything properly until I was about six, the rest are just fleeting, passing shadows that get reinforced by other people telling you things. I remember nothing of McLaren Vale at all but I know we were there, that's where my father went officially bankrupt and I heard fearsome tales of what the Bankruptcy Act was like in those days, when the bailiffs moved in and literally stripped the house, pictures off the walls, books off the shelves, and just left one plate, one knife, one fork, one spoon, one cup, one chair for everybody, but I don't remember any of that at all.

Was that actually at the beginning of the Depression or was that before then?

Well let's say I was four, so it would be 1927.

So it was actually, obviously part of the Depression.

Yes, it was. The Depression went from about the early twenties it started. It was at its worst in the thirties, but my father had the same trouble in later country practices, that he was a softie, he never chased his debtors, and if people couldn't pay, that was just too bad. It was after McLaren Vale so probably when I was about five and because of our poverty, perhaps I overdo it a bit, the family was split up amongst relatives and that's when I went, at six, to live with my aunt, Aunty Lou, Lucy Hawke, who was postmistress at Old Noarlunga and I think, she was the first and maybe only the postmistress in South Australia and probably in Australia of a proper Post Office not just an agency because her husband, my mother's brother, was the Post Master there

when he died and they let her or whatever the proper term is, stay on there as the official Post Mistress.

What was his name?

Darcy, Darcy Hawke. Again I don't remember him at all. I'm told that I went in to view the body but that doesn't mean a thing to me at all.

What was Aunt Lou like?

Aunt Lou was a bit of a sort of typecast character out of a sitcom. She was round, that was a better description than fat, she was fat of course, but she was so fat that she was round, she was like a big round peach with sort of match sticks for legs and arms. ... a very jolly person and with the kindness of distance of time, I thought she was one of the nicest people I knew, because I did see quite a bit of her. Many years later I boarded with her just before the war in Adelaide many, many years later, and she and I got on famously. She was just one of those kind, gentle, soft spoken people who just seem not to have anything nasty ever to say about anybody at all. I think a lot of 'smart alects' were a bit impatient with her, they thought she was a bit dumb but I think that was their mistake not hers. After all, as I said, she was probably the only Post Mistress in Australia, certainly in this state, running that small post office, so she certainly had all her marbles, but she was very quiet and very self effacing.

We'll come back to Aunt Lou because I'm sure there're lovely stories there. I suppose I would like just to get the brief chronology out of the way. You stayed in Noarlunga and then moved around to various relatives in Kingston.

No, the rest of the family - - I'm not too clued up. Because, as you are so well aware I was an afterthought. I was so much younger than the rest of them, that they were a completely different generation. And at that age, I don't know, perhaps I just didn't care what happened to them. I was unconsciously maybe more selfishly concerned with what I was doing.

Of course, child insularity, yes.

And at that age I was enjoying it. All of our, my parents' financial hardships - I've often quite openly said so were part of the happiest times of my life because I still think that country kids have a better time than city kids and as far as I was concerned I was fed and clothes and housed and relatively reasonably happy family life, and I was just having a ball as far as I was concerned. The Depression meant nothing to me. I was lucky enough to be just young enough not to feel the full effects if it like my older brothers and sisters who as you know suffered the full penalties of the big Depression.

Where did your parents go during that time? Did they move from McLaren Vale?

They were living in, renting a place over in Gilberton somewhere. Again I have often thought to myself, not guilty, but a bit remiss, that I don't know much about what they were doing at that time, because again I was having such a ball at Noarlunga with the

Onkaparinga (the river) and I went to my first school there, Grade 1, not kindergarten. Noarlunga was a long way away from Adelaide. I don't even remember how often I saw them. I don't think I missed them. Every day was an adventure and a very pleasant one except when my cousin thumped me.

So your parents were in town, I didn't know that either. When did your family go to Kingston then?

Well that was much later, we went to Spalding first.

We should actually get their full names, of your parents. What was your father called?

Father was Walter Cecil.

Walter Cecil Marsden.

Marsden I think, yes.

Yes, good. We are interviewing the right person, that's good.

When and where was he born?

I don't know.

Dunedin?

Yes I do know. He was born in Dunedin.

New Zealand.

You should have asked me this earlier because I've got to do that dreadful thing you said of going backwards so you can do it quickly. He died, the year mum and I were married, at 70. Well dad was born in Dunedin, New Zealand probably 1881, on the 7th December. My mother was Julia Ruby Stella Marsden. Hated the Julia Ruby, so known as Stell or Stella all her life and her birthday was 21st April and I'm not too sure of the date, but around 1885 or 86 that's about the best I can do on that one.

And her maiden name?

Hawke. Her father was a migrant, an early migrant, not one of the earliest ships, but not long after. One of you girls should take a year sabbatical leave and write the story of that man. It's probably a lot of it apocryphal but all the stories I've ever heard about him was that he was, and his sister, orphans who were separated when their parents died. He never saw her again. He was farmed out to three rogue uncles, bachelor uncles, with a fairly large house on the cliffs of Cornwall who lived mainly by smuggling. They had the story book house on the cliffs with a low water cave that came in under the cliffs into the secret stairways that were hidden at high tide and that's how they made their living. According to the tales, they were a boozing, revelling, orgy mob, that my ---

Hard drinking and hard playing...

Grandfather got sick of them when he was in his mid teens. He got sick of this life and went to London and did some form of engineering, I suppose it would be called nowadays, at night school. I don't know what job he had, but I presume he just boarded somewhere and had a daytime job and did metallurgy. I think is probably better than engineering, and when he was, I don't know exactly, but around his late teens, perhaps twenty, migrated to Australia or to Adelaide and, what little I know of him, about him, which is all hearsay because being so much the youngest child of a younger child in both cases, I didn't know, literally know, any of my four grandparents. They were all dead before I was born, but grandfather Hawke started a foundry alongside Holy Trinity Church in North Terrace in Adelaide and apparently did pretty well.

His name is?

H. B. Henry Binney Hawke.

How do you spell Binney?

I think B- I- N- N -E -Y.

And roughly when did he come out to South Australia?

That's, that's... I'd have to stop and think about that.

1851, 1852, yes

I don't know the reason, but I like to think it was good judgment when he went to Kapunda because the copper mine, or the copper boom was what was saving South Australia, and he may have worked out that that was a damn sight more business up there for his work than there was in the city. So he moved to Kapunda and again I don't know when and founded it, the foundry, huh.

Founded the foundry

Called H. B. Hawke and Co. that continued for a bit over a hundred years because I remember taking my mother up as the guest of honour to their centenary when Tom Playford was Premier. That's the biggest collection of politicians and other big heads I've ever seen together in me life. He went up there and founded H. B. Hawke and Co. and they flourished. The things I particularly remember about his business, one is that he made just about every weighbridge that's used in Australia, and in the old country towns around Australia you can still see the H. B. Hawke and Co. impressed into the metal work of the weighbridges and the other is that he invented, and manufactured, some form of wheat farming implement, it wasn't a harvester, it wasn't a sower, but he had a, I discovered amongst my parents' effects when they died a typical flowery scroll certificate measuring about 2 feet by 18 inches acknowledging his, it wasn't a patent, probably had a title but I don't know what it was, but it was in very flowery script, handwritten script stating that this was all his, what a good idea it was and a

wonderful thing it had been and they manufactured that and that sticks in my mind because when I found it, I didn't know what to do with it, so I took it into our archives here in North Terrace, wondering whether they would be interested and if any place reminded me of something out of Charles Dickens play that was it. What a pokey little building with about a 10 watt globe with a little white shade that they turned on by pulling a string from the ceiling and a fellow came out with a tennis eyeshade on, which I swear still had cobwebs around it, and peered over his rimless spectacles; "What can I do for you sir?" and I told him the story and offered it to him and they were so excited that he called out, I think the total staff which was probably about 3 or 4, and they were all exactly the same. They peered out of the gloom at the back and fingered and thumbed over it and couldn't believe that I actually just wanted to give it to them, not to loan it to them or to get any acknowledgment or to sell it to the government. I said "You can have it" and it was sort of like handing someone the crown jewels but it was a very pleasant little episode. I thought what nice people they were and if you can be bothered to fish around in there you might even find it.

I was just thinking that. My mind's boggling, you should get it now. (laughs)

But that's about the only, the only thing otherwise, he just manufactured the sort of routine stuff that you would expect to in mining machinery and heavy machinery, not light machinery. Like so many of that era and that type of man, he lost all his money on the, well the equivalent of the South Sea Bubble almost. There were mining shares, worthless mining shares from South America and Mexico flogged all over the place and sensible, solid men who had had never really gambled anything in their life, got talked into putting all their money into it. Same sort of thing that happened to so many people who, made fortunes out of Broken Hill. They did all their money back on these South American and Central American mining shares and they were never poor, but he lost his business, that had to be rescued by locals putting money into it, and it kept going under that name for quite some time afterwards. The man who eventually became Mayor of Kapunda, Reece, he was one of the syndicate that took over the firm.

Wasn't he an employee?

I think he may have been yes.

Can you tell us how your parents met? When they met and when they got married?

I don't know when they got married. They met at Kapunda. My father was a rover, itchy feet, he came over from New Zealand when he was 17, 16 or 17, went to Melbourne Uni to do medicine and, I still stick by this story, nobody has ever proved me wrong so I presume it's right. He was a very smart cookie. I found he was a very modest man too, too modest. I found amongst his effects when I was going through them a couple of little cuttings out of papers in New Zealand. They used to sit for exams for the Public Service and there were two exams, I don't quite, I don't remember why, but they divided the Public Service into two sections and you could sit for one or the other and he sat for both and he topped the country in both and then did medicine.

Must have made them gnash their teeth.

He was bright enough that he finished his degree when he was 20 and my understanding is that in those days no university, Australian university anyhow, would grant degrees to anybody under 21. You had to reach a majority before you were considered old enough to have a degree. His father had come over from New Zealand and started a factory in Melbourne, light engineering, which made a lot of money in the first World War and it might have even, no it wouldn't have been before that, it could have been just to the local market, of making barbed wire, but certainly made his fortune for the barbed wire for the trenches in France. And his children, his sons, wanted nothing to do with the business. I am not inferring because they sold barbed wire to the trenches, but from what I can gather, and of course this is another grandfather that I never knew, I never met, it's all hearsay, none of his three sons, I think, wanted a bar of the business, but he wasn't too lousy so he said he would educate them and then they were on their own. And when dad couldn't get his, my father couldn't get his degree at Melbourne, although he had finished the course, his father said he'd shout him a year at Edinburgh Medical School which was, and would probably still like to claim as being the premier medical school in the world, but I think it was the undisputable one then. So his degree was, in effect, an Edinburgh degree because they gave him full status for all that he had done at Melbourne. Just as an aside, later on when I was at university myself, one of my criticisms was the narrowness of the specialist degrees, the law and the medicine and the engineering, that they were a bunch of wimps who seemed to be not a fraction interested in anything outside their own faculty, and I mentioned it to my father who, I didn't see a heck of a lot of because of the war and he died not long after that, just casually mentioned that when he finished his medical degree at Edinburgh, one of the units that he did and was credited with was history. So my bright idea in around about 1950 was probably about 70 years later than Edinburgh had already been doing it. But they believed that two or three of the humanities or that type of subject could count towards their specialist degrees, which I still think should be done here. Anyhow he, there's lots of little stories about dad that are, although they are hearsay, I'm quite sure they're right. He went as an intern to the Grace Brothers practice in Glasgow and the Grace Brothers is the famous cricketing Grace Brothers headed by Dr W. G. Grace and he probably got the job because he, my father, was a good cricketer although he was only about 5 foot 7. He didn't need height I suppose to be a good cricketer, and he played in, what in those days were considered first class matches, they used to be written up in Wisdon's the cricket bible as first class matches against Lord Arundel's team or the Viscount of so and so's team, and strictly amateur, so dad told me with a grin that he used to get an envelope in the mail at Glasgow with a second class rail ticket down to whatever castle he was going to in England just to go down on Thursday and a five pound note and that was about it. I don't think there was even a covering letter he was just, his boss had told him that he had been invited to play down there and of course was given time off by the Grace brothers and he just hopped down and was not treated as one of them but it was a sort of limbo like.

The governess, yes.

Yes, or in cricketing terms like the professionals were for so long, sort of half way between the amateurs and the gentlemen. He loved it, he thought it was a wonderful trip and not the sort of man to take umbrage because he wasn't treated as one of the

knights, belted knights. But from there he went down to one of the hospitals in London, I think it was Guys but I'm not sure and at some stage he climbed one of the big liners, the P&O line or the Orient Line or one of them, and did ship's doctor for a couple of years. He doesn't seem to have got off the boat, he never tells me he settled down anywhere, he just sort of kept going round and round. He was one of the few men I know who was willing to argue that Sydney wasn't the most beautiful harbour in the world, Rio de Janeiro was, which used to get him a fair few howls of derision. But I think this, that he came from there to South Australia and applied and got the job as the assistant to the resident GP at Kapunda, who was old Dr. Gwynne, who I understand from hearsay, was again like something out of the Victorian era of type-castings, with his horses and his surrey with the fringe on top or whatever he drove around, very lively span of horses and a top hat and an umbrella and his black bag and his grey waistcoat and his tails when he did his rounds. Bit of an old firebrand I understand, and dad was his junior, probably just an employee to start with and I would imagine became a partner.

Well, moving back to what we were talking about a little while earlier, about when Wally, your father and your mother met, Wally and Stella met, when did they meet? I think there were some interesting stories about, wasn't Stella meant to be one of the belles of the country?

Not in her opinion. She was *the* belle who only had one real rival who was a Dutton from Gawler I think.

Ann that would be probably.

Yes. I think when mum got old not just elderly but old I think she mellowed enough to admit that maybe they were on a par. Most of her life she maintained that, and I can't remember the Dutton woman's name, ran a poor second. Mum did have a beautiful voice apparently. I really didn't hear it. She was past her prime by the time I would have been conscious of it. There is a very strange coincidence that's probably not the right time to bring it up but while I think of it, is that the Church of England minister at Kapunda was the Reverend Hornabrook and that name doesn't mean much in what we have been talking about up to now on this tape, but my wife Ann was Ann Hornabrook. At Kapunda mum was the star turn in the choir, the soloist and Rev. Hornabrook who eventually became a fairly famous clergyman in South Australia, was Archdeacon Hornabrook. Most of his children, I don't know how many, I know two of them, I know that my late father-in-law and his sister who died recently, and aunt, spinster aunt, were both confined by my father at Kapunda all those years ago which we never discovered until I was courting. And while I was at the university and my parents asked me what the name of this girl that I seemed to be getting interested in and when I said Ann Hornabrook, my mother, who was then keen on connecting every name in South Australia with every other name, had to find out and did find out quickly that it was literally the daughter of the baby that her husband had confined in Kapunda somewhere about 45 years before... which, as everybody says, Adelaide is a fairly small place and that's a little bit of evidence towards it.

So one grandfather confined the other grandfather

Which is odd. It is. And Aunty Jean. I don't know about the others.

All in the family. There is a story I seem to recall about Granny, Stella, being courted by one of the Seppelt boys?

Again this is probably a pinch of salt story but I have never varied from it. She was 17 at the time and Volly Seppelt, I never heard her pronounce it any other way than with the V and not the W, was Volly Seppelt was probably in his early twenties and apparently doing a bit of courting and I think mum was a bit flattered because the Seppelts were very wealthy and very powerful people up there. In brief, apparently mum went home one day and said "I'm engaged to Volly Seppelt" and the only answer was "No you're not" so apparently it was an engagement that lasted about three hours and that was the end of it and I don't think the Seppelts were too happy about it either because in those days the German community was very isolated, insular, whatever other words you like. My mother used to tell me fairly fearsome tales, not of cruelty but the German women were really kept almost prisoners of the home and I think almost forbidden to learned English. Their husband always went shopping with them and did the interpreting. I know she said that old Mrs Seppelt or Mrs Seppelt in her terms, was completely without English and I just don't think they would have been all that mad keen on marrying out of the fraternity. I don't know that they had anything particularly against the Hawkes or mum in particular, but just a marriage out of the fraternity. I must admit I don't know whether he did eventually marry a German from up there or not.

Did she talk about going around to dinner there and they toasted the Kaiser. Do you remember that story?

Yes, they had a, from what I can gather, a rather ambivalent thing about it, don't forget that.

This is around about the turn of the century isn't it, about 1900 roughly?

Yes, probably a little after that but it was a time when Britain and Germany were on very close terms.

Oh yes, much closer than Britain and France, yes.

People forget that the same thing applied before the Second World War. For a long time Britain and Germany were very close, and in many ways, Germany has been about the only, you two historians you can know this better than I do, but in my opinion, Germany probably be the closer ally of Britain than other continental country in my knowledge of history. They seem to have been scrapping with everybody else over there for a thousand years. So I don't think it was, I don't think they were German active sympathisers. I don't think they sent money to Germany or spied, not a hell of a lot to spy on at Kapunda, but I suppose it was just a gesture to the old days that they saluted the portrait of the Kaiser who was, we used to salute the portrait of the King. Raise your glasses. It might have raised a few tempers but I don't think it really did much damage, and they were far too shrewd businessmen to have let it upset their making money in Australia, or South Australia, to be so silly as to be actively engaged in anti-Australian activities.

Can you tell us how H. B. Hawke died, that's a nice story.

Died?

Yes.

(Laughs) Well I wondered whether some humour into it. According to mum he went stone deaf and loved his books and in the house in Kapunda that I have been to since, it's one of those half underground houses, there's a lower floor, that the ground level is about window height so that the windows look as though they are sitting on the ground. I think they're rather attractive sort of houses, you walk up a few steps to a verandah to the front door, but underneath you, there are quite a lot of rooms. Apparently he made himself his own island down there, I'm mixing my metaphors a bit, and [he] didn't really mix much but read all the time. Mum said she used to go down there and he'd introduce her to the classics and perhaps read to her for a bit, but every night, every week night anyhow, they went off down to the local, I don't know whether it was a pub or whether it was a separate billiard salon because as I can remember in my youth, country towns had separate billiard salons that weren't attached to the pub, and he and his mates would all be down there. I have a suspicion it must have had a licence, it sounds like it, and they would have a few games of billiards. I don't think snooker was a gentleman's game, that was for the crooks, but they would have a few games of billiards and according to mum, my mother, it was one of those evenings down at the billiards salon with his mates that somebody said something funny and he threw back his head and roared with laughter and dropped dead by the time he hit the ground. And she always said, and I'm quite willing to second the motion, that that's about the way to go, I reckon, standing up in the middle of a huge guffaw in your seventies, late seventies. I think is not bad way to cark it.

A bit rough on your friends (laughs).

Well I always think that's arguable because I think the initial shock may be worse but I wonder how long it takes people to get over somebody lingering for five or 10 years and finishing up a vegetable. From what I've seen of it, I know which way I think the people are more affected.

Can I ask you briefly, you mentioned earlier about your father Wally being a very private man, and you only found out from conversation with your school teacher years later what a hero he was perceived from his role in the trenches in France during the first World War. Can you mention that?

I said earlier that you two are historians and I still think that somebody should write a book I'm amazed that nobody has, about that batch of Australian doctors who went to England in 1914. My understanding of it is that Britain, the Australian government, obviously offered all help and troops and whatever, and Britain said what we need most of all and very quickly are medical people, trained doctors preferably. And from what I understand, 400 volunteers lined up and shipped to England and I'm pretty sure it was in 1914 which means probably within three, four or five months of the outbreak of war.

That's August it broke out wasn't it?

It may have been in the first couple of months of 1915 but it was very early in the piece, which is understandable because if they're already trained doctors it is just a case of their own personal affairs to be fixed up first which might take a month. Some of them probably would have walked out in a week.

Granny didn't want him to go, mind you.

No, I discovered later that, well I can understand it, she had four children, the youngest

- - -

The youngest were twins.

The youngest were babies.

The youngest twin boys.

And so dad was amongst that mob and I think somebody over in Canberra in the war archives somewhere should dig up and write that story. I haven't the faintest idea what happened to them all, again dad never mentioned them, but one thing that came out of it was that they were never in the Australian Army. They didn't join the Australian Army when they joined up here, they just signed up to go to England and when they got there they joined the English Army. So he was in the Royal Medical Corp and his little badge has RMC on it instead of RAMC.

Well maybe a British historian might have done something. It would be interesting to find out.

I can't remember a single thing my father telling me of that... just on four years that he was away. He may have mentioned a couple of night clubs or big clubs in England that he was invited to because of his rank and status but that's about all and it was again when I was at the university and I think, just after my father died that I was talking to the father of a friend I had at the university, who said to me, "I'm sorry to hear about your dad Bruce," and I said "Yes, bad luck, he'd been pretty crook for a while". And he said "Oh, he was a wonderful man, we thought he was God," and I said "I hadn't the faintest idea that you ever knew him. When the hell did you ever meet him?" And he said "Didn't your father tell you?" And I said "Tell me what?" And he said "He was our doctor in the trenches in France." And I said "Dad hasn't mentioned the war to me, ever." And he said "Well he was one of the, we called him the little doc which you don't have to be told why." And he said he was one of the medicos who the men came to regard as God because they stayed there. They didn't nick back to London at every opportunity for three weeks leave, they just stayed there and about ten minutes, quarter of an hour after any wave over the top they went over too carrying their little black bag. And he said one of the things that wouldn't go down nowadays was that he was also one of these docs who carried an awful lot of morphine and if, in his opinion, the fellow only had hours to live, in agony, everybody knew, unofficially, that they would get an overdose needle, because most people that had both legs and an arm blown off didn't have a great life expectancy. And he said it was the same with the gas attacks and he said "That's what happened to me." In fact,

the man I'm talking about, told me this story, was a full invalid pensioner because of the gas that he'd taken in France and he said "I ran into a cloud of gas without my mask on and passed out and when I came to, here was your father bending over me. And he said I looked at him and I said 'What do you think doc?' and he said 'You'll be right Pat'. And he said "I never heard better words in all my life because I knew if he didn't say anything and got the needle out of the bag, that was it." And he said: "Not that I think I would have minded, there wasn't anyone there that minded because we had all seen so many of our mates in absolute agony knowing that they were dying, that they had to die." But he said he was just one of those men that you don't read about or hear about but he said "I don't remember when he wasn't there." He must have had some leave at some time or another, I said. Yes, I think he has mentioned going on leave in London and having a ball because they were heroes. He was captain because of his profession. Pat said he seemed to spend most of those times following the troops over the trenches in France and I felt terribly sad that my father had never told me that.

And he was there all that period wasn't he, throughout the war?

He stayed there for four years as far as I know.

And he got emphysema, as he died actually really, didn't he... from emphysema you think?

I think so, yes.

From the gas?

Well, in those days they didn't take much notice but it was... I don't think it was a false modesty even, I think it was just the nature of the man.

A very private man. Can we carry you on a bit chronologically leaping forward to the '30s now. You said you left home at 12. Which school did you go to?

Pulteney Grammar School.

Is that where your brothers had gone?

No, my brothers went to Saints, St. Peters College until they were about 15 but dad got too broke to pay the fees and had to pull them both away and that was the beginning of the hard time both of them had when the Depression started to bite and they were both out of work. One, Don, didn't have permanent work until he joined the Army the day after war broke out, the Second World War.

So that was for ten years or so.

And I think that affected his personality a great deal, especially with hindsight. Living at home on parents' charity with nothing but very odd jobs like penciller or bag man for a bookmaker on Saturday afternoons. Down at Kingston there was an old boat that used to come in about once a fortnight and load up wool and stuff and it was a great plum to be hired for that for five or six hours because that was probably worth about

five quid, and those sort of jobs were just about all he had for those 10 years. I think, although we became very firm friends later, at that time, I couldn't stand the sight of him because he did bully me. But I can understand it now, in fact I understood it by the time I was old enough to be in the services myself, and that's when we started becoming friends. Max had a little better spin of it in that he decided, he went into a law firm in town at five bob a week. And I don't remember how long he was there, let's say a year, a bit longer, when the senior partner or one of the senior partners said to him that they had absolutely no complaints about his work but without qualifications he would never be anything more than a clerk in their office. He'd be badly paid, his job wasn't secure and if he could possibly find something else to do that would be much better for him than to try and make his life there. I can remember Max saying that he was very grateful to that bloke because he was very decent about it and they didn't sack him, they just told him to look around. Although to my knowledge no Marsden or Hawke has had the slightest interest in the land, farming in any shape, or anything to do with it all, and I don't know how he got the job. But he finished up as a jackaroo with fairly big property owners, I think called Bundaleer Station, the same as the reservoir, up near Spalding and Clare, somewhere around there, and I think that was a quid a week and his keep. But he was treated like one of the family and he loved it there and became very good friends with the son who was, I think Radford, Brick was his nickname, Brick Radford. And Max spent a very happy time there although, they didn't have any money. The people on the land didn't have any cash money, a bit like nowadays, they're asset rich and cash poor but he was part of the family, and spent a very happy time... while Don was spending a very miserable time living at home on charity and fighting with his mother and his young brother, and anybody else in sight and having a pretty miserable time of it. He was probably one of many thousands, not only of Australians, but a few others around the world who were almost pleased when the war broke out. He was in the militia down the south east, and the third light horse and he was a very handsome ladies man.

He looks gorgeous from what I've seen.

Everybody thought he looked magnificent in his troopers uniform with his polished leggings and things for the light horse, and of course they were called up the day war broke out. I think that was a great relief to Don, to finally have something to do seven days a week.

But Max joined up pretty quickly too didn't he?

Well Max couldn't go because the farmers by this time, of course he wasn't still up at Spalding, he was down the south east as a ---

Manager.

No he wasn't, well he was, that was a big station the Lawson had down there.

Called Padthaway.

He was a bit above jackaroo but they had a manager and they had an overseer. So he was in the elite group that lived in the main homestead not out in one of the cottages with the common workers but I don't think he even had a title.

Oh, governess again, a leitmotif throughout this family.

But they were almost forgiven war service. Well, not forgiven, barred. Only a certain number could go. Well, his boss, the overseer, the manager was an elderly clerical type, but the next one down, the overseer was a gung ho fellow so being Max's boss he said you can't go, I'm going. And that was all the quota they would let go from here, the government would let go at that stage. Well, I was 16 when the war broke out, and terrified that it would finish before I could turn 18. When it lasted long enough, it took me about six months to talk my parents into letting me join up. That was the last straw as far as Max was concerned, when his baby brother had gone in, his older brother had already been in for a couple of years, his twin brother had been in for a couple of years, and his baby brother had now joined the Air Force. Stuffed if he was going to be the only coward hovering home getting white feathers sent to him in the mail so he marched up to town and decided he'd follow me into the Air Force and he went into the recruit depot and I've often told the story *ad nauseam*, of the medical check you did at the Air Force for air crew. A three and a half hour medical check, they didn't miss a thing. If you had a flea under your toe nail they would have found it. That's the greatest medical thing I've ever seen designed. Max marched in there after I'd been in the Air Force for a few months and to his complete and utter disbelief didn't pass the medical because he had been on farming for about 10 or 15 years and I was a bank clerk and he reckons if a bank clerk was fit enough to be a bloody pilot or air crew, how the hell could they knock him back. But he was colour blind. That was one of the main things.

Yes.

So he and a couple of his mates were so brassed off that they went over the road to the Gresham Hotel and, to not put too fine a point on it, got nearly pissed and decided that they weren't going to give up and marched around to Currie Street and joined the Army, the infantry, which he regretted to the day he died because he hated it. I've never seen a more miserable soldier in all my life. He was a little skinny fellow, his uniform looked as though it was the last one on the shelf, and he had to take it whether it was his or not. His neck size was about five sizes too big for him, it stuck out about here with his little thin neck sticking up and he hated it but he sweated it through. He finished up in the anti aircraft battalion and there's a lovely story that's got nothing to do with what we are talking about now ... of when I actually saw him in New Guinea and the trouble that the Americans went, it took them all day to get us together for about an hour. That was one of the many, many times that I've said that the Americans are so generous, pleasant, helpful, lovely people.

That's something that I think we should be ending now, that's something we will be spending another whole time I think, your experiences in the war, particularly in America.

So you were 18 when you joined were you?

Yep.

18, and you signed up in Adelaide?

41?

Anzac Day '42. I actually marched, 273 of us in our civvies marched down King William Street and down North Terrace to the railway station to go to Victor for the initial camp. I actually joined up six months before but they put you on a waiting list, and they gave you a little badge to wear that said that you had volunteered for, and been accepted into the Air Force, and you were to wear that.

Finish