

Now, this is Mr. Norman Outram. How old are you Norm, I think 93?

93 in July.

And where was it you used to live in Northcote, what was the name of the Street?

661 High Street in 1922.

Tell me about your shop.

It was the hairdressers and library I had there, and I employed a hairdresser, that's me in the dark clothes.

A Library - that's unusual with a hairdressing shop.

Well, it seemed to work alright in those days.

They used to have little libraries with shops didn't they?

About 1,000 books - I used to look after the tobacco shop and the library and the hairdresser looked after the saloon.

And what year was that?

That was 1922.

And how long did you have that shop?

I had a 5 year lease, and when I'd been there 5 years I didn't renew the lease, but I bought a shop in the same block - I've got a photo here of it - that shop was a lock up shop from Mr. Kidd, he was a wood merchant, and I had a dwelling put on the back of it and a new window put in, it was an angle window when I bought it, the window was well in from the street like.

And this was still in High Street was it?

Yes.

What number?

669 - same block. So I transferred that business into this business and I was there 20 years, and when that photo was taken Esme, Norm's mother, was 2 years of age.

The first shop you were in became a fruit shop did it?

It became a fruit shop after I'd left it, it was sold. I think you can see a notice on the side of that picture somewhere. Can you see an advertisement, well that's when it was sold, Burgess the butcher bought it and he let it to a fruiterer because it was an empty shop. See I transferred my business into this shop that I'd bought.

I think you had something to tell me the other day about the man who started the S.S.W.

Yes, Vic Steet, he was the grocer right opposite this shop - he was on the corner of Martin Street. Of course he's dead and gone years ago.

And what did he have to do with S.S.W.?

He started the self-service - there were no self-service shops before then and the grocer had to run up the counter and get the pound of salt or whatever it was and bring it down and put it on the counter, and the customer would give an order for a pound of tea he would have to go over there and get a pound of tea, he had to do all the running about. But when self-service came in, the people who were buying the goods they collected the goods themselves. That's where the self-service comes in, the people themselves were doing the work and they found it worked out quite well.

Did you like shopping in the self-service shops or did you prefer the individual attention?

Oh, mine wasn't self-service.

No, I mean when you used to go shopping.

Well, there was no self-service then, it was just starting.

How long ago since you've been doing any shopping?

Well, I don't do any shopping at all.

Not now you don't, but you used to, did you?

My wife used to, I never done any shopping myself only personal shopping.

Tell me about the price of the haircuts, how much were haircuts?

1/6d. for a haircut and it was ninepence for a neck-shave and sixpence for a shave.

And did many people come in for shaves?

Oh yes, we were always busy, the hairdresser was always busy. In fact the man, Bob Duncan his name was, he was the Secretary of the Hairdresses Union, and he came in and was talking to my barber (the one in the first picture, Cyril Callam), while Cyril was working on a chair and I went into the saloon and I ordered him out of the shop. I said you want to talk to Cyril (because he wasn't in the Union you see) you talk to him in his time, in your time. I said I'm employing this man, I don't want you discussing things with him in front of the customers, so I told him to get out.

He said I'll blackball your shop. I said, well you please yourself about that. Well, he blackballed it, but I never lost a customer because I was so well-known the customers didn't take any notice of what he said, didn't take any notice at all.

What hours did you have the shop open in those days?

Well, we had to close at 7, we were open at 8 o'clock in the morning. I put fancygoods in, but I had to divide the shop inside this door.

I had to put in two doors just inside, one into the tobacco shop and one into the fancygoods shop, because the fancygoods shop we had to close at 6 o'clock, and I'd have to close the barber shop if I didn't do that, so I put in two doors, one into each section, because we didn't want to close the barber shop at 6 o'clock and we would have had to do so, the law would have made me do it.

What is it, it's the photograph of

1940 it was. When the last cable tram entered Northcote, my wife and her pal were on the front seat and when the photo was taken (I forget who the publisher was, one of the papers, I don't know whether it was the Leader or the Herald or who it was) but they sent them both a copy because their photo was on the front. There was never another cable tram run after that cable tram.

Do you know that that cable tram is still in Northcote, in Mr. Twentyman's backyard.

In whose backyard?

Mr. Twentyman - he's a man in Northcote.

I remember Twentyman - where was he?

In Bastings Street.

I used to go to Bastings Street a lot. Twentyman, Twentyman,

His name's Alf.

Is he still alive?

Oh yes. Now that's your wife and?

Mrs. Forbes. They were both bowlers. I was a bowler, I was over 50 years bowling.

Which bowling Club?

Thornbury. My wife was there for 30 years and Forbsie was there about the same time.

And Mr. Forbes was the plumber, did you say?

In those days, of course he's dead and gone now, and his son was a plumber, he's gone, and Forbsie's gone and my wife's gone - they've all gone now, none of them alive now.

You tell me some of the names that were in the area at that time.

Next door to me was Howgate & Roberts, Estate Agents. There was Mrs. Young, she was known all over Northcote and Preston I think, she was an old lady then, so if she was alive she'd be about 150 now.

Did she have a shop?

She had like a milk bar, lolly shop. And then there was Herb Saunders, he was in the block, he was a tailor, and Bill Howson he was in the block, he was an electrician, and Herbie Smith, he'd be well-known, Herbie Smith and Reg Smith his son, they were Estate Agents, they were in the block also. Course they're all dead and gone now, none of them alive.

Then Vic had the fish shop, I only knew him as Vic, and he bought a house in Shaftesbury Parade, nice home it was too, but I never heard his surname all the time I knew him. I used to speak to him just Vic.

So you were one of the early members of the Thornbury Bowling Club were you?

Oh yes, from 1923 I joined. That's nearly 60 years ago.

And can you remember some of the people that used to be in it then. Who used to be bowling in the Club in those days?

Charlie Bowden was the Secretary and Tom Love was the Treasurer. When I joined Phil Mayor was the President and I think he was also a Mayor of Northcote at the same time - Mayor, that's his name and he was Mayor of Northcote.

His name was Mayor was it?

Phil Mayor and he was the Mayor of Northcote, and Bill Olver, he was a Councillor Bill Olver, he was there for donkeys years too.

Were the ladies bowling in those days?

Oh no, there were no ladies. Mrs. Williams started the ladies bowling clubs and that was some years after I joined bowls.

Was Mrs. Williams anything to do with the Williams, the jam factory people?

I don't know - her father was a Schoolmaster. No I don't think so.

How many years did you live in Northcote, were you born in Northcote?

No, I was born in Brisbane.

And when did you come to Northcote?

I was only 2 years of age when I came down to Melbourne, and I lived at Tunstall. There's no Tunstall now because they changed the name. They call it Nunawading now, that was Tunstall when I came there, next to Mitcham. I used to work at the Mitcham tileworks. I've got a photo of myself when I was 12 years of age when I was at the tileworks. I've got a photo of myself when I was 18, a photo of myself when I was 20, a photo of myself when I was 21, and a photo of myself when I was 25 when I got married.

How old were you when you started working at the tileworks?

I was there 2 years and a funny thing was that that tileworks was the only place that I ever got the sack. You'd be surprised to know why I got the sack, it was because I was too good a worker. I'll explain it to you because it sounds today's funny story.

There were presses we used to make the caustic tiles with, and a caustic tile is a tile made out of black dust or red dust, and in the centre of it is a white flower like that. Well they had men making these tiles on the presses and they were paying them ninepence a hundred for making them. Well they found that I, a kid, I was about 13 then I'd been there about a year

Did you start in that place when you were 12 years old?

Yes. Yes, I started work on my 12th birthday, 9th July in 1901. Well, when they found that I could make those tiles just as good, just as many, they cut me down to sixpence a hundred. Well the married men were getting ninepence a hundred and they all said they wouldn't work for sixpence a hundred like I was doing, so they put pressure on my mother and on the management to tip me out, to put me out.

So what did you do then?

I came to Hawthorn then, my mother moved to Hawthorn, and I started going to the Denham Street Sunday School and I met a fellow there named Norm Ross whose father was a boot salesman, and he got me a job in town box making, Morris & Walkers, boxmakers, at 2/6d. a week.

After I'd been there 6 months they found I was a good worker and they doubled my wage to 5 shillings a week, and I stopped there for 16 years, and when I did leave I got married then.

How much wages were you getting when you left?

When I left, when I got married, I was getting 38 shillings a week, and that was what they called a journeyman's wage. That means that I was proficient in working the four machines necessary to make cardboard boxes. They are the bender, the guillotine, the cutter and the rotary machine. When you become proficient in working those four machines you became a journeyman as they called it, you were on the top. But if you were on the paper cutting, you were in the money, you got 2 pounds, another 2 shillings, and that was the top wage 2 pound. I was getting 38 shillings when I left.

In those days when we got raises, we'd only get sixpence raise or a shilling raise. If you got a shilling raise that was a big raise, but it's different today, they're after \$60 raise.

Just tell me the name of the barber in the shop, the second shop, Bill Steer?

Bill Steer in the second shop.

Now start again, during the depression

There was Martin Street opposite me. There was a woodyard at the back of the tram sheds there and they used to tip all the wood there and people that were hard hit had to get an order (I don't know whether they got the order from the Town Hall or where), to come and get a hundredweight of wood because they couldn't afford to buy it. They couldn't afford to buy this wood so they used to come along and get a hundredweight of wood for nothing. They had to cart it away themselves on a truck, or just pull it along.

I don't know of any other incidents at that time. I know people found things very difficult. The best of people they always seem to get along somehow.

I had to pay 8d. a week for my train fare from Hawthorn to Town. That left me 1/10d. a week to live on, but somehow we all got a meal when we wanted it, we got it somehow, I don't know how, but you wouldn't get a kid to do it these days.

We wouldn't want to go back to that would we?

Oh no, not to that extent, no. We'd go to the moving pictures, to see Doris Day and those sort of films Gay, what was her name?

You would have gone to the silent movies?

Oh yes, no talking.

Where were they, did you go in Northcote?

Oh yes, up near Dundas Street in the building there. Where would it be, just about opposite Pender Street. The building is still there now, but of course it would be all shops now. That's where the picture theatre was, we used to go up there every Saturday night, and we used to go and play 500 cards a lot in those days, and we had to go right up to past the Preston Town Hall, and we had to walk up and we had to walk back again. No buses or anything in those days, the only way to get there was to walk.

Did you play cards with a group of friends in a house, did you?

There was like four of us, we'd all take it in turns visiting each other's house.

Was this after you were married?

Yes, when we were in Northcote.

What date did you come to Northcote?

It was 1922. I joined the bowling club in 1923.

What did you say about your barber. He gave up barbering and started to breed goldfish did he?

Yes he gave up the barbering.

Which barber was that?

He was the first one, Cyril Callum.

And did he make a good living out of breeding goldfish?

Well, I used to go up and look at his fish, but whether he made any good of it I don't know. He was up off Bell Street he was.

In a shop, or from his home?

Oh no, in a private house. He had like a shed at the back where he kept the goldfish, and he was breeding these goldfish, but I don't know whether he done any good with them. He seem satisfied anyway, never seemed to be worried about it in any way, he used to have a smile.

Tell me about where you are living now, up there in Park Crescent. Is it called a Nursing Home?

No, just a Rest Home.

Tell me what it's like there.

It's very nice. Everybody looks after everybody. Everybody helps each other where possible, and Mrs. Copley, she's Manager there. She doesn't live there, she lives out at Malvern, and she comes over in her car and she's the Manager, and then they have several girls come there working, some to bathe the old men and others to do the washing, just a couple of days a week. They all do their bit and it keeps it going.

It's nice meals you get there?

Yes the meals are quite good. They try to cope with everybody and give them the food that's necessary.

What do you do, watch television during the day.

Most of them do, but I don't because I can't see it.

That's right, of course you can't.

I can't see it and I can't read. I couldn't read an address on an envelope if anyone gave me \$100.

So you go for your walk everyday.

I just go for a little walk, that's all I can do now.

But you have the company of the other people to talk to don't you?

There's about 10 men up there and about the same of ladies. There are 20 of us altogether I think.

You all sit in the sitting room, do you, together and have a talk?

There's a big lounge there, but we sit outside mostly. There's a lawn outside and armchairs out there and people sit there and have a little chat and go for walks, there's not much old people can do you know. They all fill in their time somehow.

Do you remember how much it cost to get a book out of your lending library?

Sixpence I think, sixpence to change the book.

And how long could you keep it for sixpence?

Well, as soon as they'd read it they'd bring it back and change it. There was no definite time. Of course you'd lose a few books, but if I lost them I'd just wipe them off, no good running after them, but I didn't lose many I don't think.

How many books do you think you had in the shop?

500 or 600. I had two big racks, racks as big as that window was one, and the other one on the corner was just about the same. Might have been 1000 books, but I think I'm pretty safe in saying 500 anyway. I used to get all the books that came along, go into Town to warehouses and get them, and put them in the library and the books used to pay very well, used to pay a good dividend.

You had two very good friends in Northcote?

Norm North, he was the policeman in charge of the Thornbury Police Station, and Les Britain was in charge of the Northcote Police Station, and they were both very personal friends of mine, very good friends, lovely men, and they were heads of the two police stations, Northcote and Thornbury. The Thornbury station closed up during my time and there's no Thornbury station now, they done away with it. It was in Collins Street.

That big picture, you see the room above, well Esme and Violet both had their tonsils removed in that room. Dr. Daley got another Doctor to come with him, I don't know what the other Doctor's name was I never enquired, but the two Doctors came up to the shop and they took the two girls upstairs there into that room and took their tonsils out. Well they don't do that these days in a private house do they? I said to Esme the other day, remember having your tonsils removed. Oh yes, she said, she remembered.

Can you remember the names of the Doctors in the district in those early days?
Where was Doctor Daley from?

He was right opposite the Croxton Hotel, next to Fontaine the bicycle shop. It's not a Doctor's now, I don't know what it is.

Were you in a Lodge in those days, to pay for hospital and doctors' fees.

You mean a benefit Lodge. No, no I wasn't. I had to pay. It wasn't a terrible lot, it was only about 20 pounds or something, I forget what the price was.

But I'll tell you one incident though. Just before I came to this place up here, I've been up there about 8 weeks now, I was at the hospital for 13 days and you know what the bill was - \$1,700.

Which Hospital?

St. Vincents. But I happened to be in the H.B.A. and they paid it. Fancy, \$1,700 for 13 days. My wife died in there. She was in there for about a fortnight and her bill was \$704.

How long has she been dead?

Just on 8 years - \$704, where mine for 13 days was \$1,700. I don't know how they work it out, but Esme said that they charge \$104 a day for the bed only, without any extras. You know, the Doctor attending you and medicine and one thing and another, \$104 for bed only.

Mr. Outram lives at the Special Accommodation House on the corner of Arthur Street and Park Crescent.

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