

Waverly Council Oral History of Waverly Beach Inspectors Early 1900's.

Interview with Alex Menzies (AM)

Interviewer 1: Lawrie Williams (LW)

Interviewer 2: Kimberley O'Sullivan Steward (KOS)

KOS: This is an interview on the 4th of August, this is the 4th they say, 4th of August, 2007 with Alec Menzies, and Lawrie Williams and Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward. Lawrie is from the Bondi Pavilion, Kimberly is a local states librarian at Waverley Library and this is being done at Waverley Library. So, Alec, is it Alec, A-L-E-C?

AM: A-L-E-X, Alexander [], you got it wrong.

LW: I got that wrong. I got it wrong

KOS: We got it wrong, we got you wrong. A-L-E-X. Menzie or Menzies?

AM: Menzies.

LW: I got that part right.

KOS: Ok, so we started by getting everything wrong. It's Alex Menzies. Alex, do you mind telling me when you were born?

AM: The 17th of the 8th, 1937.

KOS: Was that in Sydney?

AM: Yes, Grant Street. Sydney Grant Street [?]

KOS: Do you want to tell me a bit about your early life before you came to the beach?

AM: Ah, well as a young bloke I struggled a bit because I had problems with my legs. I went to school at Clovelly Public School, lived at [Ranna] Park and my father used to take me to the beach as a young bloke, as a boy, as a child, and then at the age of 11, I started going to the beach on my own and met up with a crowd from the beach and used to surf down there with them. They taught me surfing and that, and I got mixed up with them, and then when I was 16 I joined the Surf Club.

KOS: When you say you had problems with your legs, what kind of problems?

AM: I had what they call Talipes, which is turned-in feet. My ankles are not very flexible, and I haven't got very big calf muscles because the legs never moved much so it never moved the muscles at all. As a young bloke I couldn't play football, because I'd get too, the ankles too easily. But when I found, when I was in the Surf Club and started board riding, and board paddling, I could mix it with the best of them.

KOS: So did you have to wear special shoes?

AM: As a youngster I did have special shoes, and I was in plaster for 3-4 months of the year, for ah, up till the age of nine. Then after I was nine, I didn't have any more operations on my legs.

KOS: So, you had operations before that?

AM: Oh yes, plenty.

KOS: Plenty of operations. And was it seen that being on the sand or swimming or water would actually be good exercise for...?

AM: Ah, well I just took to the surf anyway. I, we went skin-diving, I was in the surf, I wasn't a particularly strong swimmer. But um, ah... it was just my forte to get, to be in the water.

KOS: Did you learn to swim down at Bronte?

AM: Yes, yeh.

KOS: Did you have any swimming lessons?

AM: I had a few, but I was - I didn't pick it up real well. I was a bit, I struggled with my swimming.

KOS: Was that at the pool?

AM: At Bronte pool.

KOS: At Bronte pool.

AM: Yes, oh yes, there was a chap called Jackie Campbell, was the Beach Inspector at the time and he was a top swimmer in his day and he used to encourage me to go over there and do laps and even when I had to do my time swim, he said 'come on, we'll do your time swim' and I said 'I don't think I can do it' and he said 'come on, if you don't do it, it's a training swim', and I managed to break the time to be eligible to join the Surf Club.

KOS: Bronte bath has got a really long history of swimming. When I went into it and had a look right back actually to the early days of the... [tape restarted] I was talking to Alex about swimming at Bronte and if you were involved at all, if you were involved at all in any of the swimming Clubs there? Or you remember the major swimming teachers there?

AM: No, I... Jack Campbell was the one who gave me a little bit of tuition and got me going.

KOS: And you said he was a life guard on the beach...

AM: He was a Beach Inspector for a season or so, yes.

KOS: Jack Campbell... I don't think his name has come up before, what can you, what do you remember about Jack?

AM: He was a very good swimmer, a still water swimmer. I think he was a state champion actually. But we're talking 1916, so we're talking 50... not... 1937, 47, 57 - we're talking '54, and Jack wasn't a young man then, so he'd been a very good swimmer round about the War era.

KOS: Right, we'll have to look up when he, [] what you're saying about Jack Campbell. So if...

LW: That name I don't know.

KOS: I haven't heard his name mentioned by anyone...

AM: No, he was a sprinter. He could kick the quarter in 6.20 just with his feet.

LW: Is that right?

AM: He was that efficient with his feet.

KOS: And you think he was just a seasonal Beach Inspector ...?

AM: I think he only worked for one or two seasons, because Jack, Jack I think ended up having a business at the markets.

KOS: Oh right, down at Haymarket?

AM: And he ended up running the Coogee Aquarium Pool.

KOS: Oh, yes...

AM: Him and another bloke called Billy Duggan, and I think Bill and him were partners in this business.

KOS: I know Bill's name.

AM: Yeh, well Bill's a member of the Club, he's passed on now, Bill, both Jack and him, But Jack, I don't think he worked too many seasons on the beach, and it would have been the short seasons, the like, from October through to the end of March or something.

KOS: The kind of summer, that busy period.

AM: Yes, in those days we did...

KOS: So you met up with these people down the beach, and was that quite common, you were 11 and down the beach by yourself...?

AM: I'd say it was. I think the kids get down there younger on their own now, to be honest with you.

KOS: Do you?

AM: I think they do, but I started [young] down there, I was at Clovelly Public School, and I joined the Air League...

KOS: I remember the Air League.

AM: ...and I met the boys from Bronte and that's when I started going down to Bronte. I was with a bloke called Ian Wilson, and another chap Frankie [Puttick], and Tony Hunt.

LW: Is that Robbie [Puttick]'s dad?

AM: Yes, ah, Robbie [Puttick]'s brother.

LW: Brother.

AM: Brother. And we used to be a group down there, and then there was others on the fringes too, that was the main group.

KOS: And was that mainly kind of a surfing, kind of were you a young surfer or [was that involved] with the Club?

AM: Well, we used to sit at the ramp at Bronte, right near the Bogey Hole. We used to surf on the reef. And that's where... Some of the boys had big surfplanes, or we'd get our surfo's off the [] and in the winter time we used to play a bit of rugby league the boys were playing, and we play a lot of touch football down there, and we'd also skin dive in the winter time.

KOS: Did that help you with your feet and your legs? That kind of, were you - when you say football, were you running on the sand?

AM: Well, I played beach football for the Surf Club.

KOS: Right.

LW: There's a picture isn't there, in the book? Is there a picture in the book?

AM: I know there is a picture, I might be in the background, when the A team went on I was generally a reserve.

KOS: Just really amazing for strengthening the legs, like there's nothing like running on the sand, it's just...

AM: I find it difficult to walk on the sand now. My ankles sort of - my feet slide in that way all the time, if I'm on it for too long I get sore ankles.

KOS: So, you were on the beach, you knew people, you were starting to surf. You were doing your swimming and you were becoming better. At what point did you start... you said you were about 16 when you were approached to join the Bronte Surf Life Saving Club.

AM: Yes, when I joined.

KOS: And was that quite common, people would see you there, see that you had a bit of commitment, see that you were fit and they would say 'would you like to join the Club?'

AM: No, not really. We used to hang around the beach, and it was my ambition to join the Surf Club. And I struggled to do it. I had trouble with doing the swimming. But eventually I became a member there, and I took an interest in it, more or less from the day one, because I remember going to committee meetings and things like that, trying to be, you know, a 'younger voice' I supposed you'd call it. Because it was still a bit ah, you knew your place in Surf Clubs, you know. Senior members were the senior members you were a junior member. But I took an interest in what went on.

KOS: So, what year was that, that you joined the Club?

AM: Well it must have been '54 I got my Bronze. Yes, I'm pretty certain its 1954.

KOS: So, its 1954, it's on the beach, what were the major things that you were dealing things as a member of the Surf Club? Was it beach safety, was it social problems on the beach?

AM: Oh, I was in the patrols like every body else, and we surfed a hell a lot, I mean we were always out in the water.

KOS: Do you remember that first season?

AM: Not specifically... no, they were all intermingled, I'm afraid.

KOS: All those summers intermingled, a bit like when you thinking about your childhood, and its like those school holidays that just went on forever and they're kind of one after another...

AM: There's not a great deal I can pin point to be honest with you

KOS: Is there anything from those early, well those early season, it may be not the first one, that you remember, something like, ah, even just the flavour of the times?

AM: Ah, there's nothing I can pinpoint, no... there used to be a couple of members there, no, that's not what you want to talk about...

KOS: (laughter) Don't want to put it on tape?

AM: I remember being young, and... I remember being young and looking on a Sunday night looking over the barricade into the Sunday night dance that was held at Bronte Surf Club.

KOS: Oh yeh? Tell me about the dances?

AM: The dance floor, it was a 14-piece band used to play. And it was terrific music, absolutely terrific and the older blokes in the early 20's and mid 20's, they and their girlfriends and that used to get down there, and being 15, 16 and 17 I never used to go, because I was sort of too young, and it was later on when we started the dances with the Col Joy Boys and the Delis was getting started and Little Patty, and all those sort of things, that was my era of going to dances.

KOS: And they were held...

LW: It was an era to remember really.

KOS: It would have been great.

AM: It was. It was a lot of fun.

KOS: Was that a regular thing, on a weekly basis?

AM: Well, the Sunday night dance was a regular, yeh.

KOS: And were they open to everyone, if the people know...?

AM: Oh, they come from near and far, because in Sydney in those days there was about four or five dances. One was a mixed cabaret, I think out along Parramatta road. There was one down at Rose Bay, the [Monash Hut] that was Thursday nights, Bronte's was

Sunday nights. There was out at Taverners Hill, what was that called - there was a dance out there on a Saturday night, across the road from the Taverners Hill pub.

LW: What about Bondi - was there anything happening there?

AM: It was a little... I can't really think of any there, but remember down where they call - where the park is at North Bondi, where the barbeques are...

LW: Yes the Ledo it was called...

AM: Yeh, yeh, there was that there...

LW: The Beach []

KOS: The Beach [] yeh...

AM: He was like a bit of a [] Club, wasn't it? Had a bit of an atmosphere.

LW: Yes, upstairs there was dancing.

AM: Well, there could have been, but I don't think it was like these regular dances that people used to go to, like the Surf Club the Monash hut, and these other places. Vic's Cabaret. Vic's Cabaret was on the corner I think, on the corner of Parramatta road and Sydney road.

KOS: Oh right, yeh...

AM: Near the university there, near there...

KOS: Near Grace Brothers.

AM: Yes, across the road.

KOS: Oh really?

AM: I'm pretty certain.

LW: [] Was that the old Flying Boat base?

AM: It was right next door, or was right where the RSL is, now.

LW: Yes, yes. I think it was the [] hut. One of those... the [] hut.

AM: Yes I think you're right too. Exactly. It was. Exactly.

KOS: The old Catalina Flying Boat, Rose Bay. So they were in the Surf Club, and were they upstairs?

AM: No, the Surf Club - Bronte Surf Club only had one floor.

KOS: Oh, so just in the...

AM: In the - the Surf Club was shaped like this, like a T. And the band was here, and ah, they danced all here.

KOS: Wow. Big crowds?

AM: Oh, good crowds, yes. Actually I think there is a story, I don't know if it should be put on here. But the treasurer, the funds that was coming in, somebody managed to pocket some of it, instead of the Surf Club getting it.

KOS: Oh, don't worry that's a common story.

AM: Yeh, right

KOS: It's a common story at a lot of the [].

AM: Anyway, the Club was making a little bit of money out of it, and as I say it was a Big Band, terrific musicians. And they were mainly guys as far as I know, who did it for fun, it was their social outlet. I think they may have got paid, I couldn't... Frank Norton could tell you, answer this better than me, but they loved their music and they used to get there, and the music was terrific and it was the Glenn Miller stuff, and all that sort of stuff.

LW: Big Band.

KOS: Yes Big Band music.

AM: Yes Big Band music. It was good, it was great.

KOS: That would have been great.

AM: It was.

KOS: So, working on the beach... and...

AM: Well I didn't start working till I was in my 30s.

KOS: I was going to say, how did you make that transition from being in the Surf Club to actually working on the beach?

AM: Well, I had quite a number of jobs in my time.

KOS: What were you doing for work while you...

LW: Before you went on the beach?

AM: What was I doing? I was an apprentice fitter and turner, and then I worked with another bloke on a truck. Then I was working with Bill Wallace making surfboards. Then I got a job with the water board and I was with them for quite a number of years. And I ended up I was, I was driving a truck that had a closed circuit TV set it and we used to go to places checking out the water pipes because you could put the TV camera through and you could see that they'd been relined with concrete. Then I left that for some reason or another. Then the job on the beach come up and I got, and I become a Beach Inspector.

KOS: How did you know that that job was coming up?

AM: Oh, every year there'd be an ad in the paper.

KOS: So, they didn't come to the Club and recruit...

AM: No, not like that.

KOS: ...from the Club...

AM: No, you'd know the gossip...

KOS: You'd know that it was coming up, you'd hear the word...

AM: Yes, you'd hear the word that it was on. And I ended putting in for it, and I managed to crack - get the job, get my job.

KOS: So was that, when they were recruiting, was it a seasonal job you got first?

AM: Yes...

KOS: So it started off as a seasonal...

AM: ...it was about close to eight months of the year if I remember rightly, because I think we finished at the end of April...

LW: That's right.

AM: ...and we'd start at...

LW: ...October long weekend.

KOS: Isn't it from whenever Easter is, to October long weekend?

LW: It's generally the end of April and the long weekend in October, wasn't it...

AM: Yeh. It become, when the May school holidays was over, and then you'd start before the September school holidays or whatever it was, was started, so there was somebody on the beach when the kids were on holidays.

KOS: Sure.

LW: Always the school holidays.

AM: ...and that break between was when you... in those days most of us never worked with the council in the winter time, you know, you'd find an alternate job.

LW: They'd only keep one person on, [through] winter, the head life guard.

AM: Well, Aub used to be running, was looking after things at Bondi. And he'd be doing the flagpoles up...

LW: Painting poles and...

AM: ...and painting reels... and maintaining equipment....

KOS: Maintaining equipment.

AM: See, in those days we had those bloody surf reels, which was a pain in the neck in as much as you were one out on the beach but you needed three or four people to help you do a rescue, because they had...

LW: The line...

AM: ...somebody to feed the line to you, somebody to haul you back in...

KOS: Back in... Yeh.

AM: ...where with, when the advent of the surfboard well, you could do a rescue basically on your own, and of course its gone on from there, you know like the torpedo tube and things like that.

KOS: Yeh.

LW: Jet skis.

AM: Well, now you have the Rubber Duckie and jet ski.

KOS: Oh yes, yeh.

AM: But I mean in those days, it was, in the first few years, well you didn't a board to even do a rescue.

LW: There were no rescue boards.

KOS: So, when you applied for this job, what was the competition like?

AM: Ah, not much competition, a lot of people...

KOS: And how many people were they recruiting?

AM: Ah, well when I started, there were two at Bronte, two at Tamarama and there'd be about four at Bondi...

LW: Seasonals?

AM: Seasonals, yeh.

KOS: Do you remember the names of any of the other seasonal people who started with you?

AM: When I started...

LW: Who was on the beach?

AM: Well, Johnno was on the beach, Aub was on the beach.

LW: Alan Johnson.

KOS: Alan Johnson, yes.

AM: Yeh, Brian Davidson, when I very first started, Brian Davidson, there was another chap called Johnny Hepworth was at Tamarama. There was another chap, Eddy Cousins was at Tamarama. Who else worked with me? Tommy Blake started a little while after.

LW: Pearce Biram?

AM: Pearce Biram was the weekend man.

LW: [Casual]

AM: Yeh, he was always the weekend man, and done it for as long as I can remember.

LW: About 30 years all up. And he was an engineer with the railways...

KOS: And he worked during the week?

AM: I think he was with the railways, yes.

LW: Monday to Friday with the railways and every weekend on the beach.

AM: When I first - if I remember correctly, - when I first started we had split shifts. And we did two weeks at Bronte and two weeks at Tamarama, and you did the morning shift and the afternoon shift.

KOS: So, you did a morning on one beach and then an afternoon shift.

AM: No, no, no, we didn't - one week I worked from say, six a.m till...

LW: Three, was it?

AM: No, no, no, six till one. Or, what we did is you worked the morning shift in one week and then you worked the afternoon shift the next week. And we put it in such a fashion that you got 2 days off during the week, and you'd work 11 hrs shift on the two days that you were there, and the other bloke was off.

LW: You think that system had been around a long time?

AM: No, when it first started, Johnno was the head Beach Inspector I think, because Aub has been moved aside and put as a carpenter with the council...

LW: In 1969, I think.

AM: ...and I remember it going to the engineers... Johnno wanted a roster and he submitted a roster to the engineer...

LW: Don State.

AM: No it wasn't Don State, the next bloke [] the bloke who ended up getting Alzheimer's disease.

LW: Not John Iosa?

AM: No, before him. He was the second engineer. Anyway, Johnno submitted his roster and he didn't like it, no, I gave Johnno the roster and Johnno submitted it to him and he said, "that's not good enough". I happened to bump into him, and said "you didn't like the roster I drew up?" and he said "oh you drew it up?" and I said "yeh, such and such..." "I'll look at that again," and that was the roster we went on to. And it was Monday, 6-12, 12-6, Tuesday 6-6 with an hour for lunch, Wednesday 6-6, an hour for lunch, Thursday, Friday off, and the other bloke would do that. Then Saturday was 6-12, 12-6, Sunday was

6-12, 12-6 and then the bloke who was on in the afternoon would go to Tamarama in the morning and do something similar. But where we didn't work Tamarama the Club looked after it, so Saturdays you'd work till one o'clock then Sunday you'd work from 6-9, then you'd go to Bondi and work till 1 o'clock.

LW: Ok.

AM: ...so we were doing that.

KOS: That was great, that's really good to know, we've... hadn't had a sense of that and how that worked and how you moved around [].

AM: Matter of fact, we didn't work till one o'clock, we worked till 3 o'clock but you'd leave Tamarama at 9 o'clock, and had to be at Bondi by ten and you'd work through till 3, and then you knocked off. You were an extra man, at Bondi.

LW: Later on, we, pretty much when I started which was 1978 and you were at Bronte, everyone was locked into their beach. There was the seasonal, I was Bondi, you were at Bronte, Tommy was at Tamarama,

AM: Tamarama, that's right.

LW: Nigel... so you were all locked in to your beach

AM: Yeh, we were staying at the one beach. What happened was, I put it to somebody, don't know, could have been that engineer, we were... you'd have trouble with the board riders. And you'd say "right well, you're banned for a week or a fortnight or whatever it was" but the day you moved to Tamarama beach, they'd come back to Bronte, because...

LW: Unbeknownst to []...

AM: ...unbeknownst [] the inspector who'd been gone, see. So I said, we're having sort of problems with that, its hard, "oh ok," and then it worked out "okay, we'll leave you at the one spot." And that's what []

LW: So, I have you to thank for being locked into Bondi all those years!

AM: It's possible, if you look at it that way.

KOS: Oh, I didn't realize that.

LW: No, it's alright.

KOS: So, it was actually about kind of social control on the beach. I thought it might have been about because there's just really particular features, water features, rip features...

AM: Oh, no no no.

KOS: ...beach features, that you would know, because we hear these kind of legendary stories around Black Sunday, and things like that, that people looked and said “there’s going to be trouble in about half an hour in that corner because of what’s happening now”, because people were just so incredibly sensitive to the wave movements and the really classic patterns, and “we have a storm coming in the afternoon, this always happens here” and you know, just really knew those geographic features.

LW: Board riders were a big problem [], weren’t they.

AM: Oh, yeh, the young blokes, they’re flexing their muscles anyway, as you know, the testosterone and all that jazz.

KOS: Do you think it’s a time when there was a lot of conflict between the Clubs...

AM: There was a bit of... there was...

KOS: ...and the board riders and there was that incredible social divide, where if you were one, you weren’t the other.

AM: Yeh, well there was a bit of that involved, there certainly was a bit of that involved.

LW: The board riders were the board riders and the Clubbies were the Clubbies.

AM: I always felt that the boardies were a selfish crowd to be quite frank with you, and I couldn’t see any harm with being part of the Surf Club, because as far as my life’s concerned it’s been great for me, and being part of the Surf Club has opened up other areas for me to get involved with things.

KOS: Sure, and you were a board rider anyway...

AM: I was a board rider, yes, when it was...

KOS: ...before you were in the Club and before you were the beach...

AM: ...when it was... I competed on the board at races at carnivals, I road surf boats, I’d sweep surf boats, I paddled surf skis, I did all those things that the Club was involved with.

LW: Well, that’s present tense, too. He’s still doing it.

AM: Well, yeh...

LW: You’re still sweeping...

AM: Yes, I swept last season.

LW: Still paddling. You were.

AM: I didn't do much this year because I got my self wrapped up in the boat crew, to be quite honest with you. But, I'm coaching Gayle Dundas again, she's one of our senior women members.

LW: Barry's...?

AM: Barry's wife.

LW: Barry's wife.

AM: She's a terrific athlete, this girl. She's a good swimmer, she paddles a board, and she's a pleasure to be in the company with, teaching her things...

KOS: Oh great...

AM: ...she's great, and she likes to exercise...

LW: Can I ask a question of you? We talked about the guys you started on the beach with in around... was it 19-

AM: 1968...

LW: ...68, what about the guys that you remember working on the beach when you first joined the Club. Who were the guys, who were the people you remember working as Beach Inspectors?

AM: Well, obviously Serge Denman.

LW: Was Roger Riley...?

AM: No, Roger's era had finished by then.

LW: Someone told us, I think it was Warren Riley told us in an interview that he did something like 40 yrs on the beach, but I'm not sure if that's...

KOS: []

LW: ...it's a long time. Aub did for 40 years, I know that for a fact. Roger was renowned for having been the man who...

AM: I didn't think Roger did it for that long, to be honest with you. But, Warren would know best, I would say, but he was before my time. I don't even hardly remember Roger, and as a kid before I was 15, I don't really remember the inspectors that well. I know Serge was there, because he got me... oh no, Serge was there in the 20s anyway. There was a bloke called Kevin somebody, Kevin, he was a nice bloke, a good Beach Inspector, a Bondi chap and I think he was asked to work Bronte for a couple of seasons.

KOS: Did you remember having a good relationship with them? When you were...

AM: Oh, as far as I'm concerned we never had any hassles with the Beach Inspectors. No, they were good blokes, you could have a talk with them. You know, and when the big seas were on and the beaches were closed that was our ticket to go and see Dave Brown and get a [surfo] off him and we'd go up the back of the baths and crack bloody 18-, and 15-foot waves.

KOS: Oh, my god.

LW: Dave Brown being the son of the first Beach Inspector and he was, the first Beach Inspector.

AM: Dinny, wasn't it? Dinny Brown?

LW: Dinny Brown, yes, Dinny Brown was the first Beach Inspector appointed in 1913.

KOS: Not Stan as in Stan McDonald, as is often written...

LW: No, Stan came along a couple of years after that. Dennis in the 1920s took up the lease of the Bronte change sheds and they did, they lived upstairs.

AM: The Change Sheds, yeh, that's right.

LW: And Dave went on to represent both the eastern suburbs and Australia in Rugby League.

KOS: One of [] wasn't it?

AM: Dave used to - When we was playing touch, Dave would walk out of his shed and watch us all play. Don't know if he was talent scouting to see if he could find some good footballer but he'd watch, he'd watch for quite a while, you know an hour at a time, he'd be, and we used to play terrific games of touch down there, I tell you. And there was good footballers we used to play there. Johnny Raper used to play there.

KOS: Oh really?

LW: []

AM: [Ken Eugene] But you know, that park, there's a lot of good footballers that run on the park, I can assure you. The [] learned some of their rugby there.

LW: Dick and Ken.

AM: Dick and Ken, and John. You know that part from the tram shelter round to that ramp in the middle of the beach? Well they used to do line kicks. You know the rugby union blokes try to kick the ball and never bounce out and things like this? That's where they used to practice. They were in there, footballing, oh Kenny, Kenny was a fullback, Dick and John were all forwards, so they shouldn't have been kicking the ball much anyway. But the same token...

KOS: That's a really nice part of Bronte Park's history that I haven't heard before. Because, there's the East - they've had their centenary this year at the Club and the people, they're doing a big centenary book that's coming out and they used a lot of this collection for their book, but I didn't realize there was such a history in terms of Bronte Park and you know tying in with the football history. Back to the beach. Tell me a bit about Bronte beach. When you started there, in the Surf Club and then you went on to become a Beach Inspector, did I ask you what year you started as a Beach Inspector?

LW: 1968.

AM: About '68

KOS: 68. Can you tell me a bit about what you think makes Bronte different as a beach, like where are the trouble spots, where are the beautiful spots to swim, what's really special about that beach, what would you be watching for when you went out?

AM: Bronte's got that rip on the southern end. That's a given. That's always there. Occasionally we get one on the north end, but the southern rip's the predominant one. Its reef gives you a nice little wave. You know, when I first started you could go out there and body surf, but with all the board riders it became too dangerous, you know, but that's where a lot of people used to body surf and crack at the waves. The pool's great, I mean the bogey hole's good for kids, the park's nice at the back, the pool's a good little pool, its safe, it's a bit unique you come down into Bronte, its not like Bondi, where its surrounded by shops, and god knows what else.

KOS: You've got the beautiful gully.

AM: ...and the gully, yeh, well you've got the park.

LW: And you've got the miniature train. Don't forget the miniature train...

AM: That train, that's been there since time immemorial, as far as I'm concerned.

LW: Grasshopper.

KOS: I've got photos of myself, really little on that train, and oh gee, about five years ago I took a girlfriend's son on that train, and I thought "my God, its gone like a whole generation", I mean he's not my child but you know, I'm kind of really close to him and I thought "oh my God, it's like a generation" and I remember when I went on that train as a little kid, my parents saying "we went on this train". Isn't that incredible!

AM: Yes.

LW: Yes I remember going on that train. We spoke yesterday about eating those potato scallops out at Phil Boyce's.

AM: Yeh.

KOS: Nothing like a good scallop at the end of the day.

LW: ...the Boyce's, George's wife. They had those potato scallops and I also remember the donuts they made in there, that was your treat at the end of the day. That was when there was a fruit shop.

AM: Yeh, there was a fruit shop and a milk bar and Bobby Lo's Mum's Chinese restaurant.

LW: Oh, that's right.

AM: That was a milk bar-cum-restaurant.

KOS: I've got some great stories about those - the Chinese restaurant, and that man who started the restaurant was a warden, in Bronte...

LW: During the second world war...

AM: Ah yeh, no...I've heard that story too, yeh, they thought the Japs had arrived. Yes, yes.

KOS: ...and the woman fainted. I don't know, even if it's not true, it's a great story. And he went on as a warden and knocked at the door of the person who had their light on. That's a great story. Yes, so, there's that rip at the southern end, is that really parallel, like that rip at the southern end of Bondi?

AM: Ah yes...

KOS: You know how there's that consistent rip that's there all the time?

AM: Yes, yes, exactly. The shape of the beach means that you've got waves coming in that are 250 yards wide, into a strip of sand that's only about 220 yards wide, so there's

an excess of water, so it's got to move. So it, and the swell's generally got a little bit of south in it, so it's heading that way, then it wants to do - the excess water wants to do that.

KOS: So... would that be an area then that you'd really keep an eye on?

AM: Yeh, with Bronte it's like so, and you'd generally put the flags from the middle to the north, that's the safest spot generally.

KOS: Yes, that is true. I'm kind of thinking back years and years you're always kind of swimming up that end and walking down, if you're taking, going to the baby [] taking the girlfriend's son there [] or going, I love Bronte pool. You're always walking away from the flagged area, it's never near those baths, is it?

AM: Yes, and what happens is they'll get caught in a bit of a rip, the rip runs along the beach and then it goes out. Now, often people, there's the flags, and they're being dragged this way, so they'll swim back towards it. By the time they get to where it starts to run out, they think 'oh', by swimming back toward it they don't go anywhere, it takes them far enough that they start to go out, then they want to swim to shore and then they're still not going anywhere, because they are against the rip, whereas where they were going that way, if they swam to the beach they'd get in. You with me?

KOS: Right. Yes.

AM: But by the time they'd wake up that they've got to the shore, they've started on the outward part of the rip. But as a Beach Inspector like, in the early days I would sit on the surf reel at about 3 o'clock or 3.30 in the afternoon, down on the southern reel and watch the kids because they'd all come home from school, they'd have their boards and their body surfos and whatever, and I used to sit there for a couple of hours.

KOS: So the flags would be up from the middle to the northern end of the beach but you would sit down the other end with the reel.

AM: I never, it was not a sort of thing, you'd watch kids and you didn't have to police them all the time. You know, I mean there'd be a group surfing on the reef and you'd knew they'd be alright and there'd be a group in the flagged area. And you'd just keep an eye on them, that's all, that's the way I'd...

LW: I just thought of a question for you. You would have come into that time when the reels, the surf reels were on the way out, and the rescue boards came in. How did that happen? When do you that happened and how did it come about?

AM: Ah, to me it was a bit of a natural progression. We worked out the reels were useless, you know.

LW: One out, with a reel was a four person operation.

AM: Yeh, I did a rescue on Bronte one day, when the Wharfies picnic was on. It was a bad surf, but I didn't close the beach. It was a beautiful day with a fair swell on, blowing offshore, beautiful. Anyway, I ended up doing a rescue, and I swam out, with the belt. And a few of the boys fed the line to me, and I managed to get out [] and grab hold of the bloke, they were pulling me back, I got pulled down a dumper. Wasn't impressed at all. And one of the blokes on the line was the R and R coach. So you can imagine how impressed I was, the R and R coach has pulled me down a dumper with a bloody patient in my hands. But it was... getting rid of the reel and line was the best thing they ever did.

LW: Because with the rescue board when they first started using them, were they using the board that were being used for competition, or did they [] made?

AM: Well, they were, we did use a board that was competition size, you'll find a rescue board now is approximately 10 foot six long, which are competition racing board was, but now they've made them a bit thicker with buoyancy and a little bit wider, and needless to say they are a little bit slower to paddle but you can get yourself out there, and put somebody on it. I mean we went through the throws, you know where you roll your board over, grab the blokes arm and you pull [] and you pull him onto the board, we developed - the one of blokes who can - who deserves a bit of credit for that, is Lenny Haskin... remember Lenny Haskin...

LW: I remember Lenny at Maroubra

AM: I think it was Lenny that worked out how to pull a patient on to the board...

KOS: That sounds good, did you ever do that...?

AM: ...without...

LW: No, we were pretty much....

KOS: That's a lot of upper body strength. If you're out of your depth in water, that's a lot of upper body strength isn't it...

LW: It's all brute strength.

AM: Oh, yes. Basically, but most of the time you'd get to somebody, and you'll say, "hang on get your breath back, right ok, now lie on the board", and you'd bring their legs up, put them on and away you go. But if you've got somebody's who's in a bit of difficulty, well that's the way you could pull them on, without any problems.

LW: So, they lie across the board, then you just pull their legs up, pull them back...

AM: Yeh, pull them back...

LW: ... and get yourself positioned where you can paddle...

AM: Yeh, where the balance is and away you go.

KOS: What was the, in terms of new rescue techniques, you were glad to see the end of the surf reel, what was one of the new rescue techniques, new rescue equipment, that lead to new rescue techniques, that came in when you were on the beach that you loved?

AM: The surf board was the best as far as I'm concerned.

KOS: You loved that.

AM: Well that was it...

LW: It still is.

AM: ...it still is. And then you've got...

KOS: ...still the rescue board.

AM: ...the torpedo buoy, where you can swim out, get to somebody, put it round them and support them. I mean there's no hurry to get back to shore, in this day and age, if you've got a big sea on, and you go out, you take them out to sea and you wait for something to come and get you. For example, I'm at Bronte one morning working, 9 o'clock, three kids come down with their boogie boards. Three kids go out to sea and get into trouble. Anyway I've gone out and got one, no, there's four of them, because I got one, and, no there was three because I went and got one, and the other two drifted further out to sea and I went out on the board to try - and I told them to "go out" because we'd call the helicopter. Well, they went out off the reef on Bronte, went over to the north end. Anyway, they decided to have a crack and they've gone to shore. Well, by this time I was paddling out and a big dumper come and I was on the back of the reef, so I've abandoned the board, and went underneath it and come up the other side, kept swimming out to sea because I thought the kids were still out there. Well, by the time I've got about 250 metres out, they were back at the beach, and I thought "oh buggar this", anyway...

LW: Sitting on the waters edge, like this.

AM: ...over the hill comes the helicopter, and they must have said, I don't know how, the... 'the kids are in, the beachie's still out there'. So they've dropped the line, picked me up and taken me to shore. Turned it into a rescue, or a... so they just brought me in, and when they picked me up, they went up and up and up, about 150 feet in the air, and lowered me down on the sand at Bronte, and then they landed. The bloke who jumped in the water with me got his equipment together and away they went back to where the base was.

KOS: That was good training for them anyway.

AM: Well, it was good training, and in those days, we used to go, the Beach Inspectors from each council would do one day a week helicopter duty.

KOS: Really...

LW: I remember that.

KOS: Wow.

LW: I didn't do it but I remember it being done.

AM: We, I used to go...

KOS: What was that, so that was part of your work, part of your ongoing training...?

AM: Yes we'd go to Long Reef...

KOS: Yes.

AM: ...no, you wouldn't, we'd go to Mascot aerodrome, you'd get in the helicopter, and you'd go to Long Reef and you were based there and you'd be part of the crew for one day. And it was Randwick man would be on Mondays, Waverley on Tuesdays, Manly-Waringah was Wednesdays, somebody else was Thursday and Friday, and we were supplementing the crew on the helicopter.

KOS: So, tell me about that day, what did you do, you got on at Mascot...?

AM: Yes, we were one day, we went to Long Reef, anyway the helicopter, they were helping, there was a helicopter, parade or show, you know, what was it called...

KOS: A television show...?

AM: Yes, a television show. Anyway, we went to where they were doing the filming and ah... then ah, and then ah, while we flew over Bobbin Head and did a rescue of a boat that was adrift they'd run out of fuel. So we organised things for them and then we flew back to Long Reef and then we flew back to Mascot in the evening.

LW: When we, ah, I am going to digress a little bit here. When I first started when you were on the beach, socially at the end of each year, I remember quite clearly that when we had the end of the season knees-up, Bronte and Tama- would do their thing, and Bondi would do their thing. We'd go to a restaurant somewhere, and it was only a few years later that we all got, we all went out as a group. But prior to that, and probably prior to your time on the beach, they had what was called the Annual Reunion of Beach Inspectors up the eastern seaboard. Was that still happening round 1968?

AM: It didn't happen every year. Round about then yes, I remember going to a beach inspection function up at Newcastle...

LW: That's right, I've heard of that.

AM: ...and um, where else did we go?

LW: I've seen one another...

AM: I think we went down to Wollongong. But they weren't done every year.

LW: Ok, because we've seen the fancy menus and the [] surfers paradise back in 1965.

KOS: Yes, yes.

AM: I went to one that was run by, I think Alan Johnson and them organised it at Bondi.

LW: At the diggers or the Bondi Hotel, perhaps?

AM: I think it might have been the Bondi Hotel.

LW: There was one there, there was a send off one year for the Whale, Bill the Whale Willis, at Bondi Hotel... and they had everything done up nicely, with menus and invitations.

KOS: Do they still do that?

LW: No, they have the APOLA conference every year, and that, it's not a reunion, in effect it is a National Lifeguard Conference.

AM: Yes, you just had that recently?

LW: That's right, they had it at Bondi at the Swiss Grand Hotel

AM: And they did a little bit of a competition.

LW: They have an Australian championship. For the lifeguards and tied in with that they have work shops and key speakers. It's a lot more formal, in those days it was a reunion...

AM: It was a social thing

LW: ...it was a get-together.

AM: A get-together.

LW: A lot of the pictures apparently that we had down at Bondi of the reunion went walk about, and there's a lot of conjecture about who actually took the pictures with them up to the Gold Coast. There's a couple of suspects up there.

AM: Yes...I think you'll find, yes.

LW: No one's put their hands up yet to say they have the photos.

AM: He's a self-appointed historian, Alan Johnson...

LW: Well, we are yet to... I've mentioned this to Kimberley... and we are yet to find this out.

AM: Yes, yes... Johnno can be boring. He can be a little bit boring, when you go and...

KOS: Oh dear, we might have to see about getting copies of some of those photos. So, ah, we were talking about the rescue equipment, you remember the board coming in and you loved it, you were saying, Lawrie was saying that he felt the same way, it was the most valuable thing and the torpedo...

AM: The torpedo buoy...

KOS: ..and that. As long as you could keep people buoyant, and up, and hanging on to something, you didn't need to rescue them, so they didn't need to be on the sand, so long as they weren't going to drown, if there was a mass rescue on.

LW: You know, we kept the reels on the beach, even through Alex's time and my time, they still kept on the beach, and some sort of ..

KOS: Yes, they were still there.

LW: ...and along Bondi they had them up the back, and every Monday you'd come along with an oil can and rag, and you'd have to feed the line back on where someone, some hoon had pulled it out. We were still maintaining them...

KOS: What was the function of that because I remember going to the beach and seeing them in the '70s, they were still there? So I thought that was a bit strange when we started to do this project and people were saying they were gone for a long time by then. Because I remember seeing them, and then marching down and just kind of sitting there.

LW: Alex would know that better than me. They were there purely...

KOS: To serve as back up?

LW: ...on the back of the beach...

AM: Yeh, yeh.

KOS: People didn't quite want to let go of them?

AM: There might have been a little bit of that, though...

LW: Ceremonial may be?

KOS: Very iconic Beach Inspector and life saver image, the, you know the reel...

LW: Alex, you'll remember that there were in the 70s and probably long before that, famous fishing spots. There were like, the Merc, what we knew as the Merc below the North Bondi golf course at [] park, there was also one at the Boot at South Bondi, and what...

AM: And the one at Mackenzies Bay...

LW: ...and that was the one you guys maintained at around once a week.

AM: Yeh, checked it out.

KOS: And one being the reel.

AM: And there was one at North Bondi, the Point, [Ben Buckler] Point.

LW: and what it was, was a box on a stand, a timber box, and inside the box was a length of line, surf line attached to a ring, a life ring. And they were there mainly for the benefit...

AM: The rock fisherman.

LW: ...the fisherman, there were a lot of fishermen in those spots but our job on a Monday was in particular at North Bondi down the Merc was we had to scramble...

AM: Down that ladder

LW: ...scale down that rickety old metal ladder down at, and it was a fair drop to go and make sure that the line, because the lines would be cut, all the line, people take the line or they'd take the life rings.

KOS: So, the idea would be that somebody with the rock fishermen would be able to throw it in to them.

AM: Well, if somebody went in you could grab it and throw it to them and haul them back in, but they weren't particularly efficient either, I might add. You'd be lucky to throw it 20 metres, I'd reckon.

KOS: Well, you've got to throw it, the person's got to grab it and with the pull out of the tide, you've got to be able hang on or tie it onto something so you don't just get pulled out...do you know what I mean?

AM: There's not that much drag, but by the same token...

KOS: Isn't there? Yes, I was just going to say, you've got to be able to...

AM: No, not much, I don't think that's the problem. Getting it to them was a bit of... if they've gone 20-30 meters you'd be lucky to throw it that far. They're a cumbersome, weren't they?

LW: They were. I never used one...

AM: Not really easy to throw, it was a token gesture.

KOS: So, what was the latest you remember them being there?

LW: I can remember, being one of us, would be sent out, I think, Alex, it was either on a Sunday or a Monday, might have been more frequently than that. We had to go around and do our three, the three you mentioned, that was Ben Buckler, the Merc and the Boot, and then you guys did...

AM: The Tamarama ones.

LW: That's right

AM: There was one at [Rodney] Pool too but it was... it was... hardly ever used. Never used.

LW: I remember that one. I don't think it went too far into the 80s to be honest.

AM: No.

LW: Before they just gave up using them.

KOS: So, early 80'. It's just that the very first thing that the council provided was a ring with a rope attached...

AM: Yes, that would be right.

KOS: ...and that's in the council minutes, where the Clubs first approached the council for support and council says "we will provide a ring with a rope attached and it will be in some kind of box down there, so that if there's a problem that people can go and get it"

and then they asked for the ring to be replaced, so that goes right back to the beginning of saving life on the beach. So it's kind of interesting that it was still there...

LW: Still a vestige...

KOS: ...eight decades later there was still that last bit of ring on the beach, attached to a rope.

LW: As we said mainly for the benefit of the fisherman in those...

AM: Well that's right, exactly. No, if anyone got into trouble on the beach you'd be using other equipment. But for the rock fisherman, yes it was there.

KOS: Do you remember any fatalities while you were working at Bronte?

AM: As a youngster I remember a woman had jumped off the cliffs at Bronte and her body come in. But as a life guard, I was very fortunate that I didn't have a fatality. And the only time that somebody passed away on the beach - in the park I wasn't on duty. So I was a bit lucky that way.

LW: Do you remember that, I know that around at Bondi we had problems and you might remember this too, that the clinic in Murray Street where we had quite a few jumpers that used to come out of the psychiatric clinic, which is still there, its called the Sydney clinic.

AM: That's right.

LW: I can recall clearly some of the bodies we retrieved were those of the people that had...

AM: There was a chap that used to work at Bondi Baths, fell in, and they think he struck his head, and he disappeared one I think, say, Sunday afternoon and his body was seen floating around Mackenzie point into Tamarama. Eddy Cousins was the Beach Inspector at the time and they must have told Eddy, and Eddy's come out and I've traveled out from Bronte, and the body was hanging like this in the water and Eddy's on a big wave ski, it was, a big wave ski, and we tried to grab the body but we were a bit dubious. Anyway the water police came around and picked it up and it was the chap who, he was, he worked at Bondi Baths, don't know whether he was part lessee, part owner, part whatever it was. Yeh he died, they think he slipped and cracked his head

LW: [And slipped around].

AM: ...and he didn't come up till Tuesday, Tuesday afternoon.

KOS: Wow.

AM: I remember that, that incident.

KOS: I just remember, I thought there was a fatality at Bronte in the sixties, seventies... and there hadn't been for a long time.

AM: I was... not but there was a drunk, I think he was a drunk, die there one time, in the sixties, but I don't think I was a Beach Inspector at that time. I think I was just a Club member, and I don't, I might not have even been on the beach that day, to be quite frank with you.

LW: I can tell you this Alex, you probably worked with one of the worst Beach Inspectors who ever set foot on the sand, and that was that chap, that was that fellow, he was in North Bondi Surf Club. He only worked one year...

AM: Not Aaron somebody, can't think of his last name...

LW: That's him. He used to oil himself up...

AM: He was a poser...

LW: Oh, and of course, trying to rescue somebody on a rescue board when you've oiled yourself up...

AM: No, he was a dill.

LW: He was a disaster.

KOS: I suppose you do have that problem of weeding out the cowboys.

AM: Oh, well...

LW: He was an exception, wasn't he? He was an exception.

AM: No, he was a dill. I mean Bobby [Connelly] was the only Beach Inspector that never took his shoes off. He was another character in the group of Beach Inspectors...

LW: I said to Kimberly, you could confirm this, that basically when you that knew a job coming up, where there was a vacancy, the Chief Beach Inspector who was George in my day, and you were in charge of Bronte of course, you'd have to get in the know, with the Club, you'd say, "is this fellow Alex, is he alright, does he go alright in the water?" And that's how the interview process worked, it was basically....

AM: I helped George get his job...

LW: Did you?

AM: ...and I helped Peter Benning get his job, because when they were wanting to do the job, I was senior at Bronte and I ended up I gave them the okay to [Iosa] if I remember rightly, and they started. But you'd find out who was worthwhile to maybe have on the job...

KOS: When you say 'worthwhile', obviously people have got to pass their physical...

AM: In those days it wasn't as severe as it is now...

KOS: It's pretty strict the physical requirements now, yeh.

AM: And some of the changes which we haven't brought up yet are like the use of the Oxyviva and things like that... you didn't have those things...

LW: No automatic...

AM: No mouth to mouth, or no defibrillators - none of that, it's gone in leaps and bounds in the last 20yrs or so.

LW: Technology wise...

AM: Exactly.

KOS: I want to ask you about that. But just before that, so you're looking at the physical skills, what else were you looking at, when you said somebody would be good - they'd be good on the beach, they'd be a good Beach Inspector. Was there anything personally about them that you were looking for - team players, not too much ego, not too much of a cowboy...

AM: Oh well, yeh, you'd want a team player, all those things, you didn't want the cowboys and things like that. But as a Beach Inspector you were a bit of a PR man and dealing with people is a good attribute. You could talk to people, you can get your point across, or you just exchange pleasantries to people because there was a lot of regular beachgoers, so you get to know them and they get to know you.

KOS: And they're your allies, too, aren't they, when there's trouble.

AM: Well, sort of to a certain degree, it becomes that. Like when I was taken off the beach because I had a transgression, I went to the Australian Surf Titles...

KOS: Oh, I want to hear about that story that's got a circle around it []

AM: I think you're going to ask some more if I stay here...

KOS: You can come back.

AM: ...but a lot of people used to go to Don States and ask why Alex Menzies not there, and he accused me once, “you must have given up the idea of being a Beach Inspector nobody’s asking why you aren’t there”, he thought I was prompting them to go and see him and I wasn’t. I just let it lie. Yeh, a lot of those people did say, “why did you move Alex Menzies? He was doing a good job there”.

KOS: I just think that often too when you can be really easily outnumbered, those regulars that you build up a good relationship with, or generations of people have built up a real relationship and respect for Beach Inspectors on the beach, they’re your great allies...

AM: Well that’s true. I mean they are...

KOS: And I think that they are, and I see that just kind of briefly here. I’m really lobbying to get an assistant, and the biggest people - I’m thrilled - who are ringing my boss and the Mayor, are my regular users, and are saying “no, no, she needs somebody else, take her off the desk” they are my great groundswell of support, my regular people who come in and are writing books or whatever, they become a great support for your service. So...

AM: I think I did alright at Bronte with people...

KOS: Because you rely, because you can be outnumbered with a crowd so easily, you’re relying on a lot of goodwill that is part of the culture of the Beach Inspector, aren’t you.

LW: You are. I can recall when I first came on the beach, that the three beaches were quite clearly related to the three Beach Inspectors in particular. There was George at Bondi, Tom Blake at Tamarama, and Alex at Bronte, you associated those names with those three beaches. They were the guys who ran those three beaches. Although George was the overall boss...

AM: Yeh he was...

LW: But...

AM: I didn’t want to go to Bondi...

LW: I know you didn’t.

AM: Because I could have possibly have gone there and been the overall boss, but I’m glad I didn’t, I was not, it wouldn’t have been me. And then George, there was a bloke he lasted about 24 hours, or 2 days, he was going to be the senior Beach Inspector...

LW: I didn’t know this.

AM: Oh yes,

LW: This is a bit before, just before me.

AM: This was the beginning of one season, he got to Bondi, and he was going to be made the Beach Inspector, the Chief Beach Inspector. Anyway he lasted, he didn't last a week I reckon, it was about 24hrs. Anyway he said, 'no, too much for me', and that was when George was taken from Bronte to Bondi and become the Chief.

LW: I heard that it really just, wasn't so much that he got the job, but so much about ability that he was the only one who wanted it.

AM: Yes, that was how it was.

LW: You don't remember who the guy was who lasted...

AM: I can't think of his name... no...

LW: Ron Taylor had it for a...

AM: Oh yes, Sneaky had... shouldn't tell tales out of school, but Sneaky had a funny attitude. And Johnno had a bit of an attitude. But Ron was, Ron worked the system and I think not to the betterment of the beach and the job.

LW: I think it was to the betterment of the side bar of the Bondi Hotel, sometimes.

AM: It could have been a little bit of that too but I mean he was... I don't know, I don't understand, their attitudes actually...

KOS: When you went from being just a regular Beach Inspector to Chief Beach Inspector...

AM: I was a senior at Bronte and Tamarama.

KOS: Senior, what was the difference in your role?

AM: Not much, not much.

KOS: I was going to say, were you snowed with paper work?

AM: Oh, hell no,

KOS: No, so you were still very hands on, you weren't removed...

AML: No, no, really it didn't change much, I had a run in with Tommy Blake one day, in as much as he had dogs on the beach. Now he was in charge of Tamarama, and I was in charge of him. Anyway I said to Tom "you've got to get those bloody dogs, its one of our

bloody jobs”, anyway him and I had a bit of words and I said “well you know what we’re supposed to be doing”. Anyway, fortunately the next day, he’s come around and said sorry. I wasn’t worried about it. But I just told him, you know, “part of our jobs is to keep the bloody dogs off the beach”, it was a bloody hassle, I hated having to do it myself in as much as you’d have this confrontation every now and again, some people you’d be “you mind taking the dog away”, they’d do it, others wanted to argue the toss with you.

KOS: And then if a dog runs up, and you look at a [] running around the beach trying to catch the dog.

AM: There’s ten-thirty on a Tuesday and the beach is half empty sort of thing or not many people and Tom’s there, you know, and I used to say, “you’ve got nothing else to do, ask them to get rid of the dog”. But um no, it wasn’t a hands on type being a senior, you were just the senior just meant you had a few extra more dollars in your pay.

KOS: And there was probably a bit of recognition...

AM: Oh well, it was a bit of recognition, there was no doubt about that, but by the same token you never acted like a ‘boss’ boss.

KOS: Did you have to sort out any problems between the Beach Inspectors?

AM: Ah, I can’t really recall too many. I was working with Johnny Hepworth once, he was starting, I’d start at 9 o’clock, he’d go to breakfast or lunch or something and he had the beach closed. Anyway, I’ve opened the beach and when I went to lunch he closed it again, and this is Tamarama, and the beach is quite safe as far as I am concerned, but Heppy was a little bit nervy I think. Anyway he wanted to close it and I wanted it open, well, there was a clash of Beach Inspectors arguing the toss, over were we going to open the beach or were we going to close the bloody thing.

KOS: That’s pretty basic, whether the beach is open or not ‘hello’.

LW: It’s funny, because you had pressure from people like local guys who wanted to have a surf, and they wanted to see the flags down.

AM: Oh yeh, well that’s right, the boardies is the one who’d want to put their boards in the water.

KOS: Absolutely []

AM: But in those days Tamarama was virtually banned from the boardies, from about nine o’clock, to six o’clock or something, you know.

KOS: We don’t have a lot on patrolling on Tamarama, that’s an area and one of the things we wanted to talk to you about, about that kind of like the unique issues of that beach and certainly historically, Waverley council really fought. They didn’t want to

have Beach Inspectors at Tamarama, they felt that the beach was really unsafe, and it was quite late in the day when Beach Inspectors go there, and I know there was a struggle with the Club and surf life saving in the early days, they thought it was a really dangerous beach and having Beach Inspectors in the Club that would encourage people to go there and it was inherently just one giant rip, and all you'd be doing is dragging people back in who went out. What did you find?

AM: Tamarama can be a dangerous beach... there's no doubt about it.

KOS: It's still rated 8 out of 10, ten being the most dangerous by surf life saving, and often they say it is the most dangerous patrol beach, or the most dangerous Sydney beach.

AM: Yet again, it's got its little rip that runs (whistle) around to Bronte. What did we used to call that? The ah...

LW: Not the Bronte express?

AM: No, no, the Bronte express... that's... the 'mixing bowl'.

LW: The mixing bowl.

KOS: Yeh, where is the mixing bowl?

AM: You know those big rocks they call the twins, at the southern side?

KOS: Yes?

AM: It's just off that, and that's where it...

KOS: When you say the mixing bowl, is it kind of a swirling...

AM: (grumbling sound to imitate heavy swirling) Yeh, oh, no it can be a real menace.

KOS: Have you been in it?

AM: Oh yes.

KOS: Have you been in it?

LW: Yes.

AM: I did rescues...

KOS: What does it feel like?

AM: Oh, it's... its rippy and you have trouble fighting the waves. You've either got to go with it or you swim out to sea and come around the long way, or you go round to Bronte.

LW: It's alright if you know what you're doing, like we did. But if you were someone who didn't know what you were doing it was quite frightening.

KOS: And suddenly you were in the middle of it...

LW: It's quite frightening. There was that young, do you remember a few years back, they lost that group of Islanders went out there, after they were warned, young islanders, they were warned not to go in there, they were actually quite rude. They went in and one of them ending up losing his life, despite the best efforts of the kids from the Surf Club and the life guards.

AM: Was that the Mixing Bowl, or was that on the Bronte Point?

LW: You might be right, it might have been closer to Bronte Point. I think... yeh.

AM: I thought it was, I think it was closer to Bronte Point. Bronte Point's got an area there that's got what we call a 'lift'. And the waves surge around there, too. We used to have a gate...

KOS: The northern end of the beach.

AM: The northern end of Bronte, yeh. The cliff goes down and there's a rock sits out, and you try to stand on the rock, and fight the waves. And then other times you'd try and go up, to see how high up the cliff you could touch.

KOS: Oh My god!

AM: ...and we were there one time...

KOS: And that's why it's called the Lift?

AM: No, the lift's a little bit further around. There's another lift at Ben Buckler, too isn't there...

LW: There's a lift at Ben Buckler, yes,

AM: ...the more famous one?

LW: Shaped like that.

KOS: Oh, there's always people jumping off there... Off the rock...

LW: That's Flat rock. That's Flat rock.

KOS: Off that rock platform?

AM: No, the lift at Ben Bucklers round the front...

LW: It's right around.

AM: And you can come up over, and into a little bit of a lagoon-ish thing.

LW: That's right, but there's a big rock in the way now.

AM: Oh is there?

LW: No-one goes in there because you get smashed into this rock.

AM: Anyway, this Frankie Puttick was there, one of my mates, and the waves come up and went down and the water used to surge underneath this rock that was there and he was held down for a long time. Well when he come out his eyes were like saucers and he couldn't get up the rock quick enough...

LW: He's climbing the ladder... in those days...

AM: Yes, oh gees.

LW: You know, as Kimberly was touching on, that we had gaps where we now know a fair bit about the Beach Inspectors and the history of beach inspecting in Bondi, and Bronte but certainly to a far lesser degree in Tamarama, except to say that with the writing of the Bronte Surf Club centenary book we were able to get some key names out of there such as Bill Pugh worked at Tamarama?

AM: Billy Pugh, yeh.

LW: ... in the early days, there was another fellow there you'd remember his name, I think its Ken, someone or other he worked at Tamarama in the 30s so it appears that the Beach Inspectors that were put on at Tamarama mainly came from Bronte Surf Club.

KOS: Yeh.

LW: Does that make sense?

AM: I think you're pretty right, and I've got a feeling we assisted Tamarama Surf Club to get going too in the early, early days. I've got a feeling that we may have helped with patrols or something in the early days.

KOS: So, there's really a twinning of those two beaches, isn't there, and Bondi was seen as its own story with its own issues. I was saying to Lawrie too, that because its always

been such an international tourist destination, you can see that very early on there are language issues around the safety and communicating beach safety swimming between the flags, really basic things to international tourists, and you see the first multilingual safety things really appear on Bondi because they start realizing, I'm guessing I supposed around 50s, 60s...

LW: Post war immigration.

KOS: There starts being real language issues around communicating on the beach. Can you remember anything like that at Bronte?

AM: I know we had a sign with about 3 languages on it, like "bath between the flags" in 3-4 languages, at Bronte.

LW: It was a big yellow sign wasn't it?

AM: Yes, when you walked past what they would call the quadrangle now, you know that square area in front of the Surf Club, I don't think it's there now...

LW: No it's not.

AM: It's not because we took down that railing...

LW: The old iron railing.

AM: I'm glad they got rid of that, it opened up the beach, makes it nicer.

KOS: Do you ever remember any of those issues, with around languages, with groups, cultural kind of problems, round unfamiliarity and the foreignness of the sea or anything like that?

AM: Well you'd obviously, I used to call them Mediterranean swimmers because they would put their clothes down and walk into the ocean, and invariably it would be opposite the rip, you know... they just...

LW: Still happens.

AM: Yes, it still happens.

KOS: Still happens, alright.

LW: Times may change, but it's still the same old story.

KOS: The same thing - you just go in and you don't really look around...

LW: It's the nice quiet water...

AM: Yes that's right,

LW: Nothing breaking here,

KOS: Oh, it's because it's nice and flat...

AM: "It beautiful here, lets go in here", and (noise)

LW: Still as a lake.

AM: But no, you deal with like the Japanese tourists. Down at Bronte nowadays we get a lot of, I think they're Chinese people come down, because that English language school up there in Ebly street and Hollywood avenue? They come down in a group and they give then some surf awareness lessons. One of the boys from the Club is running it.

KOS: Well that's great, so they're actually coming down for surf awareness not as a recreational group.

AM: That's true. They're being taught.

LW: The Japanese nationals of the 80s and early 90s have all but disappeared and it's mainly now as you say, there's a lot of Chinese, the young Chinese nationals. A sign of the booming economy over there.

AM: That's right exactly.

LW: I've got a question for you, Alex. What was it like, oh you wouldn't have much [] a bit about Aub and then Davo, because at that time, Aub had almost racked up 40 years [] a completely different era.

AM: Oh, yeh totally, as far as I was concerned. They were old men.

LW: Did they have old values? Aub in particular?

AM: Yeh, well Aub was, that era of the bikini coming in.

LW: Which is infamous.

AM: Yes that's right, and they weren't moving with the - he wasn't moving with the times at all. And he was invited to do a TV programme. Alan Johnson told me this, and to show them doing resuscitation, and it was when there was mouth to mouth. Aub took his son with him, and got on the floor and started to do bloody Holger Nielsen, he hadn't even gone from the old style bloody resus- which was again I think useless, it was just a token gesture, to doing mouth to mouth, he hadn't moved with the times, and this was on TV, on national TV.

AM: Did it go on National TV?

LW: As far as I know it did, yeh.

LW: It is certainly like anecdotal, in that you hear stories of him toward the end of his time, and still he's having 'set-tos' with board riders. He came from a such a completely different era starting in 1929, 1969 - times couldn't be any more different.

AM: That's absolutely correct.

LW: They were more 'God' ... they were almost God-like.

AM: Johnno was a bit of an old stoger too, I mean he organised the great board confiscation, I mean they got umpteen boards...

LW: It was on the book, next door...

KOS: Who started the confiscation, because we have a good story about that, haven't we Lawrie.

LW: We certainly do.

AM: Well, you'd confiscate a board every so often, but they did a mass one, one day and took about 20-30 of them.

LW: Yeh, I recall the one at North Bondi where they had the police come out on the rock shelf.

AM: Exactly.

LW: That could be the one, Alex.

AM: I think it is. I'm sure it is. Johnno was the organizer of that. Alan Johnno.

KOS: Lawrie might like to tell you a story about that.

LW: When, before I went onto the beach I was junior captain up at North Bondi Surf Club and there was one wet miserable day at Bondi, Johnno was up at North Bondi RSL having his lunch, and he had that old FJ Holden or whatever it was. I knew the car was parked there, so I thought I'd chance my hand and go and grab a wave on a fiberglass board up north. So I paddled out, he's come out having his long lunch up there, I can't remember what time of the year it was, I was the only one in the water. Anyway, he's come after me, I've run up into the Surf Club, I had the board I had was brand new, it belonged to someone else, and I knew that if I got a bit of time on him I could run into the old rooms at North Bondi and ditch that board, and pull an old, some old dinged up

thing out of the back, I managed to do that. Johnno got me, took the board but he took the thing that was just about to be thrown out anyway, and wrote me up, and its still in the book that Kimberly's got in the archive

KOS: Still in the archives.

LW: 'cheeky'

KOS: 'gave cheek'

LW: "gave cheek" - I think that was 74, 73, and of course 78, I was on the beach.

KOS: You should copy that for the lifeguard [] and frame it.

LW: That's the book of confiscations, and you'll know all the names.

KOS: There's the confiscation book, it was very funny, "got away, []" you know... []

LW: [] same line up of suspects. What about Davo?

AM: I didn't have a lot of dealings with Davo, because we were only working, like of a Sunday when I was working at Tamarama. Davo was a popular bloke, well-liked I think... and ah, and he was a bit of an icon. There's Aub, Davo and Pearce and of course, Johnno, to a certain degree, big a degree, not as big a degree. I didn't have a lot to do with Brian Davidson. He'd had a cancer cut out of his nose, I think they used to call him the Hook or the Beak, or some darned thing. He married a girl many, many years his junior. A nice lass.

KOS: He was a bit of a ladies man, we hear.

AM: I think so yes, I think he was.

KOS: [Somebody] interviewed actually, he got a punch in the nose at the hotel, because they mistook him for Brian Davidson, who was that?

LW: Oh, it was one of those...

KOS: Jeff []

LW: No, it might have been, more likely to be Ken...

KOS: Ken Hawthorne...

LW: Ken Hawthorne, and there was another Ken we interviewed with Charlie Christensen, Ken East.

KOS: Oh, yeh, Ken East, and he said, oh yeh he used to get into trouble, because they look similar, “are you Brian Davidson” no no, and it would be somebody’s boyfriend be after and come looking for him.

LW: Working on the ski fields in winter and working on the beaches in summer was surely open slather for Brian.

AM: Again, I can’t say a great deal about Brian because I didn’t deal with him that often and I think there was only about two seasons and then he went to Balmoral swimming pool. He was running that with his wife for quite a number of years. Until he got crook himself.

KOS: We’ve had a bit contact with his daughter. She’s a writer, and she’s doing quite a lot of writing, and she has sent us a whole lot of really good stuff about him.

LW: [tape stopping] Conference, the blokes of Bondi named the board after him, the [] George Quigley award for the [] the lifeguard all the other blokes select.

KOS: So, let’s have a little bit of a talk about equipment, rescue equipment and the changes you saw, and you said you were really glad to see the end of the reel.

AM: Yes, that was hard going, you needed people.

KOS: It was great, you could see it was great if you had nothing. They were so excited about it when it came in, in about 1907, 1908. It was wonderful because otherwise it was just on your swimming ability and hanging on to somebody, and then you had to hang on to them, keep them and you up and then somehow get back and if you had nothing, it was great, but it was...

AM: I mean in those days they didn’t have a pair of flippers. I mean you could do a reasonable rescue with a pair of fins on, because you’ve got a bit of power in your legs to get you going somewhere. But no...

KOS: What was the best thing? You said the torpedo was great, because if, particularly if you had a lot of people, you could keep them all up, they were up, they weren’t going under, they were breathing, they weren’t drowning, they could just stay there till you got them in.

AM: Well yeh. See the rescue board, if there is a group of four or five people you could paddle out to them and say “righto everybody hang on”, and if the rip is taking you out to sea it doesn’t mean... its not a problem. And you know, most beaches somebody will see, say you got a couple of people in problems, somebody will see there is a problem and somebody will come to your assistance to help you with doing what you’re doing. Like for example at Bronte, if the beach - say, when you were one out. You might have to grab 3 people, which doesn’t often happen. Well somebody would see that and they’d come out on a board and you’d give one to that person, they’d take it in and they’d come out

and get the second person and then you'd take the third one in, if there was two or three. And you could handle it without any problems.

KOS: Do you remember the Oxyviva coming in?

AM: Yeh, yeh, I recall being taught to use it efficiently and things like that like, being taught to do mouth to mouth and then the Oxyviva and being coached in its proper use. And of course, the defibrillator has come after me. Do the beachies use the defibrillator?

LW: The defibrillator came in...

AM: It's only been a couple of years, hasn't it? For the Beachies?

LW: ...in 19- toward the end of 1990's and they were donated by the Rotary Club.

KOS: They're extraordinary, they're the ones they talk, they have them say 'now do this' and they actually prompt you.

LW: They are automatic.

AM: Oh ok.

KOS: They are extraordinary.

AM: That was after my time, to be quite frank with you.

LW: You would have worked with the stainless steel Oxyviva

AM: Exactly.

KOS: We were just talking about that, and was that great?

AM: Well, again I didn't have to do too many rescues. I was very fortunate as a lifeguard. Mainly I'd give them oxygen therapy, which is just, they're a bit woozy and that, and you give them a bit of oxygen therapy and after a short a while, let them rest for a while and then away they go. No, I didn't have any major incidences where I used to have to get fair dinkum with an Oxyviva.

KOS: What were the changes you saw with the CPR?

AM: Well they're... still changing it.

KOS: Yes they're changing it now.

AM: The timing and the way you do it. I was talking to Barry Dundas only a month or so ago and I must admit I have forgotten the count now.

LW: They're doing 2 - they're doing 30 compressions to 2 breaths, 2 breaths to 30 compressions, whereas one person used to be 2-15, and two people it was 1-5, now it's all about getting two breaths in there and getting...

AM: Getting the blood pumping.

LW: Exactly, getting the muscles the heart muscles working.

AM: There's been some great changes made in the last 20-30 years. I've been off the beach 25 years.

KOS: So when did you leave? When did you leave your position as Beach Inspector?

AM: Around about 1981.

KOS: About 81.

AM: I think it was, it might have been before that, actually.

KOS: If you can find out when that year was that would be great and let me, let Lawrie know. And why did you leave?

AM: (laughter) I, as a member of Bronte Surf Club, was sweeping their boat crew. And I went to the Australian Surf Titles, and at the time what I'd done, I went to the Australian Surf Titles and we made the finals, we were on TV...

KOS: []

AM: We, the boat crews were in the finals, and Staties watching the surf championships and sees Alex Menzies up at Maroochydore. "What the hells he doing there?" Anyway I come back to Sydney on the Sunday night, Monday morning was told not to go to work, report to the council. "You were absent without leave" anyway I said, "George Quigley had worked for me". What we used to do, and I did it for about 3 seasons prior to that, that weekend George would work all weekend Saturday 6am to 6pm, and Sunday 6am to 6pm, the weekend after I would work for him. So the pay was always the same, you got your hours up, the beach was protected, there was nothing really wrong.

KOS: And the other Beach Inspectors were happy it was kind of something up worked out between yourselves, and those sort of things happen all the time, do you know what I mean. For me, I don't have any flexi time or days in lieu, but it's Saturday and I'm here, and its my eighth day straight, do you know what I mean? I formally work out with my boss don't come in tomorrow or work it out and everybody's happy and you fairly doing time... []

AM: You see, I got permission from the deputy engineer. I can't think of his name, the poor bugger went to.... North of... Port Stephens, he went to Port Stephens council and he lived at Trafalgar street originally, and he went up there to work and he end up getting Alzheimers at an early age. But I had said to him "can I do such and such", and he said yes, and that was George work for me this weekend and I work for... so, anyway, Iosa and Statie wouldn't believe me. Anyway I got my job back at Bondi the next season...

LW: I worked with you.

AM: Yeh, and I hated it, I just absolutely hated it. I hated the principle that they didn't believe me; two, I didn't like working at Bondi, I felt like a fish out of water. Anyway, a truck driving job came up with the council so I applied for it and got it, because I had the right licence. And as the story goes, 9 months later, one of the overseers got sick; they needed somebody to do the job. I took it on for a fortnight while the one bloke was crook. He decided not to come back to work so they said "Alex do you want to stay in the job?", so I did and I became the overseer for the council. But 18 months or 2 yrs after I lost my job, that fellow called into the council and they said "Alex Menzies said you reckon he said could do such and such," "yes I told him he could", I'd been given permission to do it. Anyway it seems that Iosa said to George Quigley that we're glad Alex wasn't telling lies, we found out he had been telling the truth. But I wasn't on the beach any more, so that was gone.

LW: I can recall, I've just got this one image in my head, when you got sent to Bondi, like being sent to Coventry, they did the same to Tony [Paulsteen], they sent him to Tamarama because they knew it would absolutely kill him.

KOS: So they'd send you to a beach that you didn't like...

AM: Didn't want to work...

LW: Tony wasn't a water man, and you had to be a water man going to Bronte or Tamarama - absolutely

KOS: Oh God.

AM: That's true.

LW: ..and I can recall seeing you on a day, southerly blowing, but the sun was out, and you were doing what we did in those days, you were beach combing, and here's not this lonely figure but here's this bloke, we'd all beach comb after the southerly blew the top layer of sand, and we'd dig up coins and rings...

AM: Yeh I hated Bondi. I lasted about five weeks there and then this job came up and I thought oh bugger it, I'll take it.

LW: You went well in that job...

KOS: Lawrie was just going to tell us about the life guard social night.

LW: As I recall when I started, this is not about me, it's about Alex, but the beaches went their separate ways when it came to the end of the year social. When you had your knees up, the Bronte and Tama- blokes went wherever they went for dinner...

AM: Yeh.

KOS: Oh?

LW: Bondi would go out for dinner...

KOS: Even though you were all Waverley Council Beach Inspectors you were still very...

LW: That's right...

KOS: Oh, that's interesting.

LW: But, I seem to remember the first year which might have been 1979-1980, we all got together and went to the Diggers Club...

AM: Yeh...

LW: ...because I remember sitting up there talking to you, I think it was up on the second floor.

AM: Yeh.

LW: We had dinner there...

AM: I can recall that night, but I can't recall much about it.

LW: I just remember it was remarkable that, as all working for the one council, we all went our separate ways for the end of season drinks.

AM: Yeh, to a certain degree, I mean you had like, Tommy wasn't a real gregarious sort of bloke, he wasn't a big drinker. You'd be lucky to catch up with Tommy at the pub and have two beers. Myself, I don't mind a drink and Gary Carter was not one to get involved. If Gary was around at that time.

LW: Is he related to Jane []?

AM: He's their uncle.

LW: Uncle.

AM: Uncle. Gary's brother's their father. Gary's up the Tweed too.

LW: Oh good. Might be a trip up to Queensland to interview those three...

KOS: Excellent - put that in the budget for next year.

AM: Well, yeh get the three of them.

KOS: Well yeh that'd be great, that'd be great.

AM: Now Bronte, just trying to think who I would, oh, Peter Benning, Peter would go to a social, Tommy Blake, Gary Carter, Heppy would go to a social...

LW: Is he still alive?

AM: No, no, John's passed away, quite a number years ago.

KOS: Alex, can I ask you, regardless of the end and how it all ended, do you look back fondly at that [] and that position?

AM: Oh yes, I loved the beach. No I loved the beach...

KOS: Do you think it was like the best job ever?

AM: Oh yeh, I loved the beach, I was talking to somebody walking the Prom, I said "I've walked this prom many a time, you know, back and forth", because you know, when I [] there'd always be company...

LW: There'd be different groups, wouldn't there? I very rarely worked there, except the end of the season for that skeleton shift. But gee, I remember it fondly.

AM: No, Bronte was a great place to work, as far as I was concerned, and I loved the job, I did.

KOS: I love Bronte, I am so fond of it...It's a beautiful beach.

AM: Oh no, it's a great spot.

KOS: Thank you so much, Alex... [tape stopping]

AM: This rescue was done on a Christmas day ...

KOS: Oh, a Christmas day rescue, that's a good story.

AM: Um, I was working at Bronte till 6pm and about ten to six, a couple come down, an old member of the Surf Club and he said can you show me through the new Club house and I said certainly, so I've taken him through the Club house, him and his wife, and then about five past... ((end of tape))