

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

Interview with Ken Hawthorne

Interviewer #1: Lawrie Williams

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(Interview on 5th April 2006 with Ken Hawthorne. Interviewers are Lawrie Williams and Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward from Waverley Council. Ken is talking to us as part of the Lifeguard History Project.)

KH: ... I was a teacher at Scotts college and I was paying the house off and everything, so I couldn't afford to take holidays. So I took on the job of beach inspector over Christmas holidays. I can't tell you how many years I was there, but I was there for quite a few years, before another member of North Bondi surf club, Colin Stubbs, said "Ken, you've got a good name in swimming, my dad owns Northbridge pool, over Northbridge, come over and teach swimming, with me, under me", I said, "right" which I did, but I can't tell you when that was.

LW: It was post-world war II?

KH: This is all post-war, it was all post war.

KOS: So Ken, do you think it was the late 40's? That you were first [] beach.

KH: I would say, roundabout, I'm just trying to think how long my kids were at school. I'd say roundabout the 60's this would be, that I'd probably... ah. First of all there was an old beach inspector, I don't know when he started, he was a New Zealander, his name was Baz McDonald.

LW: Stan.

KH: Stan Mcdonald - old Stan.

LW: Stan Mcdonald, Baz's father.

KH: That's right, Baz and I.... is Baz still alive?

LW: No, Baz passed away some years ago.

KH: He's got a few sons, too.

LW: He's got three boys, yes.

KH: Oh, we all grew up together, I mean we were very close. Well, old Stan Mcdonald, and I used to sit around on the beach with him and a couple of others, and then, and then... don't forget, I'm 86, then, ah Aub Laidlaw was the chief, when I started, now, I

don't know whether I can help you or not, he was the Chief beach inspector for Waverley.

KOS: Ken can I just take you back just a little way? You were working at Scotts College and you were a teacher, how did you find that there was a casual beach inspector position available. Was that through []...?

KH: Well, I was so caught up in swimming and the surf club and, [] I was a first class life saver, I looked around and I supposed I thought, 'gee, you know, there's a job going here', I don't know how I got it, I can't remember applying for it, but I got it, probably Aub Laidlaw. He and I were in the R&R team together, so probably Aub Laidlaw might have said "Ken, how about it? Over the Christmas holidays." So, there was... and Willie the Whale, Bill Willis, I used to swim with him up and down the baths before the war, and I said, 'Bill' - before I went to war - I said, 'why don't you come and join on up at the surf club,' and after 5 years when I came back, he was in the surf club, and I think he was the beach inspector in those days.

So, in my day there would have been Aub, number one, Brian Davidson number 2, Aub was the chief beach inspector and had to do all the dirty work and get the women with their short - what do you call them? Bikinis, out and things like that... should I keep on telling stories?

KOS: Tell me stories.

KH: And I can remember one day, a calm day at Bondi, he'd been in the news and he'd already [kicked] a couple of girls out and I think they finished up in court and I don't think the council backed him up and they got away with it. This was when bikinis were barred.

Anyway, this particular morning, a sunny morning, all of sudden there was a shark alarm. Someone saw a shark, so we started off the alarm which was just a bell I think in those days. And everyone came out of the water except this one lady. She was in the water on her own, and she just stood out. And Aub just walked down - "come on" - and she had on a short - what you call it - bikini on, and he took her up, and I don't know what happened after that. I think they went to court.

I don't think they were ever brought to justice, shall we say, but anyway, that was Aub. Brian Davidson was a beach inspector in the summer time and he was a...

LW: A ski instructor?

KH: A ski instructor in the winter, yep, yep, yep... good bloke, he and I were always on together. I never knew where he was, he might sit down probably with the girls or something like that, but anytime, no matter what part of the beach I was at, if I jumped into the [reel], went out, he was right there. So I relied on him to do that, when we had the reels in those days, and that was Brian Davidson. Now here's a story, but first of all, I ought to also tell you that what I've heard over the radio and read in the papers was wrong about Black Sunday. I was there, Black Sunday, that was 1938.

KOS: That's great. Can you tell us about Black Sunday?

KH: I can you all about, I can tell you. I can tell you all about it.

KOS: You're on, Ken.

KH: Black Sunday, not as I remember but as it happened. I was in North Bondi surf club at about half past two, whatever time it was in the afternoon, we swam our races. So Sunday afternoon, and we were all getting ready to do what we had to do, go out and swim in our races, and all of sudden, a young bloke, a chap came up from Bondi, and said "quick, quick, quick, we're in trouble up there, send all your swimmers up there, and need all your reels. Hurry, hurry."

So I was built swimmer, a good built swimmer, and so I raced up there firstly, and a couple of reels came up after me, and all I could see was a mass, and it wasn't a big sea, as everyone was saying. It was just a normal type of sea, but a couple of little waves came in that were probably a little bigger than the other, and that caused the sandbank to collapse a little bit and people were in trouble. Now this part I've learned since the war, two of Bondi life savers, very good well known people, one, Bassingthwaite, I can't remember the other...

LW: Ross - Ross Bassingthwaite

KH: Ross [Roth] Bassingthwaite, and the other one, he was an Empire games swimmer too, and the other I can't remember his name, his father used to fish for sharks on the beach, very, very good swimmer, beautiful swimmer. He and Basso took a reel each, I found this out after, after it was all over, months after, they both swam out like that, got together, held hands and stopped anyone else coming, from being dragged out -

LW: With the lines?

KH: Yes, and I, with a few others went out and started pulling them out by the dozen [] a lot of people, and we started to pull them all out, and that as the end of that. We finished after an hour I imagine, and I was only a young bloke about 18-19, in 1938, yes, and I used to go down every Sunday night to walk up and down the prom, which we all did. And it was only then, when I got passed Bondi Surf club I saw all the bodies, laying there or whatever, and I realized that about half a dozen or so people drowned. But that is exactly what happened, and I was right in the middle of it.

And I hear people talking on the talkback radio and I think I read it in the paper, there was a big sea running and everyone was in trouble. It was not, it was not a big sea. But, when I heard about Bassingthwaite and this other chap getting together like that, I thought, 'gee that is ingenuity. That is great, that is something you can put down to history', and there was a chap named Carl...

LW: Carl Jefferson.

KH: Carl Jefferson, Carl Jefferson. He was the captain of Bondi Surf club, Carl, C-a-r-l.

LW: He was later the Mayor of Waverley.

KH: He was the mayor of Waverley, yep.

LW: I knew Carl when I was in the [] surf club.

KH: Lovely chap. He had a big, big oversized, son, I don't know whether he adopted the son, but I can remember he had a son. Anyway, Carl's the chap that knew all about this, but he's passed away now. Right, now that's black Sunday, now this is worthy of note, this particular story. Davo and I, don't know when it was, Christmas holidays, we're down South Bondi there, when a couple people were in trouble. We both went out and brought the patients back in, and laid them on the beach, and Davo about 10–15 meters away from me, was working on his patient, and I was working on my patient. And Davo's patient came around.

And now this is after the war, and mouth-to-mouth and everything was in, I think, at that time, but anyway, I'm - no, mouth-to-mouth, yes - mouth, mouth wasn't in, not too sure, anyway, I couldn't get my patient to come around. Couldn't do anything and after quarter of an hour I'm beginning to feel a bit shell shocked. So I turned the patient over to the old fashioned way, which we learned before the war, I think it was the [] on the back, and I brought the patient round. Now, to me, that was a stirring event.

LW: Did you do compressions, is that what you were you doing?

KH: No, that wasn't even in, no, no, on the back, you put your hands there like that and you came up and down, up and down...

LW: On the back of the ribcage?

KH: On the back of the ribcage, yes...

LW: What was the idea of it?

KH: Well, it's all we knew in those days. Now hang on, I can tell you more about it, it comes into my teaching actually. And ah, anyway, in 1939, I went with the surf team down to Tasmania. And a lovely chap, named Don Lucas, he was what we used to call, I suppose, a SLISA examiner, a big boy, you know in charge of things. And he came down with our team. I was the baby of the team, he was the 'father' shall we say, we were very, very close friends, so that was alright, that was the trip there.

Now, after my bringing the patient back, he came down to see me a fortnight later on the beach, and I said, "Hello, Don" and he said "Hello, Ken" and I said "how are you", he said "good", and he said, "I've come down, Ken, to reprimand you." I said, "What for?" He said, "because you turned the patient over and did that..." I said, "I saved his life, Don."

Don and I were close friends, and he had a bit of a smirk on his face, and he said "I have still been instructed from the SLISA to admonish you because you didn't bring him

around the way you're supposed to, by the book," I said, I tried that, and I didn't get anywhere, and in desperation, really desperation, I turned him over and saved his life." That's a good story, that's a very good story.

KOS: Did anyone ever die on your shift?

KH: I love, here's another story. Someone rang us and said, 'there's a body off the Boot' - do you know where the Boot is?

LW: Certainly do.

KH: Just past the baths, that's right. "There's a body off the boot there, can you do something about it?" So we got the surf boat, I think the Bondi surf boat -

KOS: Floating out in the water?

KH: Floating in the water, it was a man, I think... forgotten, yeh it was a man, I think, wait till I tell the rest of the story. So, the boat went around and about half an hour later, they're pulling the body back into the beach in front of Bondi surf club. It wasn't a big sea or anything. And I can remember going into the water, and boy, I never worried about sharks again. The whole body had been eaten with prawns. I'd never known before that prawns could do that, hardly any skin left, and it was floating and Davo said to somebody, "go get a stretcher and we'll put the body on the stretcher," and it was still in the water.

And I can remember I was about to dive under to put the body, and Davo said "don't Ken, don't touch him." Someone just recently had died from something or other, some disease they picked up from the same thing, and he said, "don't go down there," and a little boy about 10, 11, 12, 13, came and went straight underneath and picked the body up and put on the stretcher. I can remember that, we took it up to the surf club, Bondi surf club. I don't know what happened there, we took it up there because I know we spent about half an hour or so in the showers, and I wouldn't go in that Bondi beach again for about a month. All the flesh was floating around from the prawns, that's a good story that. It's a very good story.

LW: Where was the ah, where were the beach inspector rooms? Was it as the side of the pavilion?

KH: We didn't have any rooms, no. Baz McDonald used to look after the - what you call, the ah, rubber things...

LW: The... yes -

KH: I've forgotten what they're called now...

LW: - the rubberies...

KH: Yes, the rubberies, and he used to lease them out...

KOS: Ok, Lawrie and Ken, please explain what the Rubberies are?

KH: Hang on, they're not rubberies...

LW: They called them narns, or ah,

KH: No. Look it's just the name that is eluding me at the moment... ah... rubber...

LW: It's a rubber floatie with two handles on it...

KOS: That [keeps] afloat, like a surfer plane...?

LW: Surfer plane. That's it.

KH: That's it - called a surfer plane. Now, he allowed us to go in there [] and of course, we helped him out and things like that. But that was our headquarters.

LW: Down there? In the Groin, what's known as the Groin.

KH: Yes, well, I haven't been to Bondi for years I haven't even seen, they've got a tower or something down there now, haven't they?

LW: The tower's moved. The tower used to be over the top of the McDonalds outlet...

KH: Yes...

LW: It's now moved down to the groin, on the other side of the main steps.

KH: What you call the Groin.

LW: That's that half circle that comes out from the promenade? Where the piers used to be.

KH: You wouldn't remember the piers.

LW: Oh, only by seeing the photographs.

KH: There were two piers out there, that was to stop the [] landing. They were going to put barbed wire on the beach, don't know if they ever did that. That's right, then after the war, they took one of the piers away. And then there was only Basil's pier, we called it Basil's pier, still left, that would be on the north side, and underneath was his headquarters, so that would be hollow right back. I don't know how far it'd get.

LW: It goes into the pavilion.

KH: I was going to say, yeh...

LW: Or it did. It doesn't anymore, it's blocked off.

KH: And is Bass still there?

LW: No, Bass passed away.

KH: I'm sorry - of course he did.

LW: Neil. Neil -

KH: Neil runs the business.

LW: One of his sons runs the business now.

KH: Yeh, I mean, we used to go on picnics and things like that, and we were down, oh, its got nothing to do with this, anyway, but anyway, I can remember, we were down on the ah, down south there, forget what you call it now, anyway, the big area down there, and we were playing cricket. All the kids, my two kids, and his two kids, and there's a horse there watching us for about 2 hours. And, all of a sudden this horse, no, the ball went over near the horse, this is after a couple of hours and my son Bruce raced over to get the ball, and I said "come back".

And I jumped under the horse, and grabbed hold of Bruce and the stallion was on top of us, like that. And it came down, and the only damage it did was to my Bruce, hit him on the shoulder no damage done, that's got nothing to do with beach inspecting, but that's the whole story. Oh yes, Bass McDonald. Basil's was the other family with us. And he helped, too, he screamed and yelled and frightened the horse away. So that was Basil McDonald. What're we up to now here?

LW: Who were some of the other people that you worked with on the beach?

KH: Yeh, look I can't remember any - I, I'm saying "I", "we" were in charge of North Bondi and Bondi patrols. So many a time... Oh, yes, lost children, I'd go, people would say, "lost a child, lost a child, lost a child", so the last thing that would happen, it would be in the water. Little Johnnie. "We'll find him for you." So I'd go to North Bondi or Bondi, and say, "fan out, and go right along and see if you can find this lost kiddie." And we always found them, they'd just wandered away. It was that.

LW: Johnno, did you work with Johnno - L A Johnson?

KH: No I didn't. He was in the R&R team with me. He was younger than me, that's probably why. I was up, shall we say, a man, I think, there were junior, I was senior. I was a man, anyway and he was a boy, put it that way. So, we were closer as friends, he

was on the committee, I can remember that. We were very close friends, but he wasn't a beach inspector. Was he a beach inspector?

LW: Oh, he was, he was the head beach inspector there, he was the chief beach inspector just after Aub Laidlaw - when they forced Aub into retirement for medical reasons, they, I think that was 1970, and I know that Alan got the job as the chief beach inspector. But it was only for a few more years and then he himself was forced into retirement as well.

KH: There was someone else you mentioned to me on the phone, who came in after me...

LW: As?

KH: as a beach inspector...

LW: As a beach inspector. Okay.

KH: You told me.

LW: Did I?

KH: Yeh.

LW: There's so of them.

KH: He was in North Bondi surf club. I have a feeling he had a son. I had a feeling he may be up in Queensland. Yes, I saw Johnno.

LW: Oh, Pearce Biram.

KH: That's it. Pearce Biram

LW: Pearce Biram - Edward pierce Biram. Pearce was a casual.

KH: Pierce - p i e r c e? Without the [] -

LW: P E R C E - P E A R C E.

K H: What's his surname? Pearce Biram?

LW: B I R A M.

KH: Biram? Yes I remember him. He came after me.

KOS: Actually I remember him when we were doing the []

KH: He came after me.

LW: Was he long after you? I know he did about 30 years as a casual.

KH: No, yes, yes, see I'm trying to work out when I was there. I'd say I was there in the 60's, now thinking of what you said.

KOS: So Ken, so after you did your first casual, so that was over the summer holidays then you just kept re-applying, or you were kind of set up, were you just coming back as a casual on an on-going basis?

KH: I think I must have been booked in for it.

KOS: Yeh.

KH: [] something while I think of it now, you were talking about um, you said to me, was I doing mouth-to-mouth? I was teaching at school, I was sports master, and a history teacher. I was everything, everything. I loved it, simply loved it, every class I taught life-saving and things like that.

And I can remember, there being a big conference, for want of a better name, all people around the world, doctors came, and the big conference was in Sydney. And they introduced that mouth-to-mouth, and boy, I remember what a wonderful thing it was, you know, and [] I used to teach to them and I used to teach all the little boys, this has been changed too I think, I don't like the idea of it. I used to teach a little song, "fifteen movements, two mouth-to-mouth, fifteen movements, two mouth-to-mouth, fifteen movements, two-mouth-to-mouth" and I taught that and I heard someone say just recently I think its 30 now.

I taught all that and the lady next door, she's about 96-97, my wife was alive then, died breast cancer, she said "Ken, Prue has collapsed on the bed." So I raced in there, and here she is laying on the bed, and my wife Joy says "do mouth-to-mouth, do mouth-to-mouth" so I got on to her and I did mouth-to-mouth and I brought her back. So I did have the pleasure of knowing that what I was teaching worked. But with this 15 movements, you have to have 2 people to do that, one doing the 15 movements... now they say its 30 movements, not too sure about that.

LW: Well they actually these days, they say just to keep the compressions going, no pause at all.

KH: And []

LW: It's not 2-15, if you've got two people doing CPR, one person yes, just does like that...

KOS: You just keep going you just don't stop.

LW: But the other - the person with the compressions keeps going.

KH: And you keep doing that?

LW: I've actually done that, and been instructed to do that by paramedics when working on Graeme Cole, at the Cole Classic, when Graeme had a heart attack down at the beach. Myself and another guy worked on him and the paramedics instructed us just to keep doing the compressions, no stop.

KH: And [Pudd] Reagan?

LW: [Pudd] Reagan? John Reagan.

KH: I - look, I spoke to him just recently, in fact I was supposed to go down there last week but I had a sore foot, and I couldn't manage to get down there. He wants me to look at some books and photos and things, and at my age, everyone's sort of looking at me, and saying, like you, trying to find out, I've got a lot of knowledge in my head, and I'd like to pass it on.

KOS: Well, that's why we're here and that's why these interviews are really important.

KH: Well, wait a moment, Johnny Reagan, I read in the paper, just quickly, that he, it was Sunday morning, he swam his swimming races, last year or the year before, dropped dead on the beach. But they took into the surf club, and there were a couple of doctors there, and they brought him around. Now Johnnie and I, when I came back from the war, he was only a junior, and another chap named Bill McGuigan, and I thought if they had fathers or not but I sort of took them under my wing and took them out fishing and looked after them, to make sure they grew up properly.

And Johnnie, when I heard he died and brought back, my son Peter, he was going to come and see you if he could, he hasn't come back, and he said "I was in the icebergs, drinking, last night, having a beer, and someone came in and said I just came back from a funeral. Dad, did you know someone by the name of Pudd?" I said, "Yes, Pudd Reagan." I said "He was the one they brought back to life."

Anyway, about - this all happened in the last couple of months, now. I rang his wife Elizabeth, who I introduced him to, really, so I knew Elizabeth. I was going to ring her anyway. The phone answered by a man's voice. And I said "May I speak to Mr John Reagan" - no I said "Is that John Reagan's residence?" "Who's speaking?" I said "Ken Hawthorne." I said, "Who am I talking to?" he said "John Reagan" I said, "Johnnie I'm just ringing up to say I'm sorry that you died!"

So it wasn't that Pudd Reagan that chap at the icebergs had just come back from his funeral. So Johnnie rings me the other night, and just recently about something, he's also, I'm in the Masonic Lodge, he's also in that. I haven't seen him for a long while, though. Now that's that story. Wait till I just go through the list - don't want to miss anything.

LW: What about the Whale, were there any good stories about the Whale?

KH: William the Whale. Well...

LW: What sort of personal stories?

KH: Oh, lovely bloke, lovely bloke, Excuse the word 'bloke', as I school teacher, I'm trying to always speak properly, when I say bloke, I think that's out of place, then I think what the heck.

LW: Don't worry around us.

KOS: Ken, you can relax.

KH: I know, I never swore at school, ever. I was in the air force and I was a Warrant Officer One in charge of people all the time, and I swore badly because you never know whether you were coming back from the war or not. Soon as the war was over, I'm not a Catholic, but I went to a convent for a couple of years, and the Nuns did a good job with me, until eventually I went over to, what's that street off Bondi road there, I can't think of the name of the street...

LW: [thirroul?]

KH: No there's a school there, I went over there.

LW: St Patrick's?

KH: St Patricks is the church, right opposite is the public school.

LW: Oh Wellington Street

KH Wellington street... so anyway, what was I starting to say there? Yeh, so, I was brought up properly, and when I came back from the war I said, I don't want to swear anymore, and I was looking for something decent to join and I joined Masons, which is good for me very, very good, and I'm doing alright there, helping. Now what am I leading up to, tell me, I've wandered...

KOS: Whale.

KH: Oh, William the Whale, that's right. Before the war I was swimming up and down Bondi baths, and he was swimming up and down and we got to know each other, and I said, "why don't you join the surf club, Willie?" He came from the country, that's all I can remember. And when I came back, here he is in North Bondi surf club, and a beach inspector. Yes, he would be number three. And he had a lovely wife Dot, who was a barmaid at the Hotel Bondi and they lived at North Bondi, just up there used to be a little swimming pool at North Bondi, just at the top there somewhere like that, and we always went around there, for Christmas day and had a meal and everything like that. A lovely couple. Rough, but a lovely - he was a lovely bloke. Rough. When I say, rough, not rough, full of life, he was full of life, and he was the person that used to swim up and

down Bondi - and they put a buoy there and a bouy there, and he made himself famous by swimming up and down Bondi beach 9-10 times, and then that was copied by others. Good swimmers, and then eventually was broken, the record.

Then he got, he got the, something or other, cancer I think and someone said "Ken, Willie the Whale would love to see you," and I said "where is he?" "St Vincent's hospital" and I went in there and he was in a big ward with about 20 people and I walked up and down twice. I couldn't see him and all of a sudden I looked again, and here's this, sunken-eyed individual, called Willie the Whale, and we did talk for quite a while and that was the end of Willie. Willie the Whale.

KOS: Was he called 'the Whale' because of his swimming ability or was he a big guy?

KH: Oh he looked like a whale, he was a big boy, big stomach, Lovely big chap. I said he was rough, he wasn't rough, he was just one of the boys.

KOS: He was just a country boy.

KH: Yeh, and that was the story about him. We were very close. All the beach inspectors were all very close friends, so you know, I suppose we felt we were in our own little group, apart from the surf club and ah, when Lawrie told me about North Bondi Surf club, I think "that's good enough Lawrie, keep going". Because I ah, I mentioned to Peter, my Peter, a chap named Lawrie Williams is coming up, "I know Lawrie Williams, tell him 'Peter. Peter Peta..'"

LW: Peter and Peta, P E T A and P E T E R.

KH: Oh, she's a big wig in Avis now, she's about number two in Avis. And ah, now what else have we got, hang on, this is what I've written down, haven't got my glasses on.

LW: Do you know at the time, do you know who was working - when you were working on the beach, do you know who was working at Tamarama, and Bronte? Were the likes of Serge Denman, um , there's another name, um...

KOS: Oh yes... um

LW: Roger Riley. Do they ring a bell?

KH: Roger Riley was from a little further up. The whole Riley family, they were good swimmers, Australian champions. The other, first one you mentioned, he was in North Bondi surf club, the first name you just mentioned a moment ago?

LW: Oh, Serge Denman, and later on he moved to Bronte

KH: Oh, well I only, I knew him, he was just a junior when I was a man. I supposed by the time I came back from the war, I'd say I would have been about 25-26, so I was a

man and they were boys coming through. But, I didn't know who the beach inspectors were in that period.

LW: Yeh, we have, we sort of got scant information about, especially Tamarama, some of who worked over...

KH: So, hang on there's actually another little story. When I was a youngster, I roamed around Bondi and I joined the Tamarama Surf club as a cadet. And came Saturday morning, there was going to be a carnival, and there was going to be a youngster's, what you call a cadet's race and I thought "oh, I'll have a go at this." went down there on the beach, and saw everyone, and met everyone and about half an hour before the race, one of the people running the club came and said "Ken, you go up on the hill there, and you're in charge of the fire and the big billy of water, you've got to make the tea." I thought, "Oh, right, well I miss the race," that was alright, I did my job. And that was a Saturday, and the following morning, Sunday morning, I went down to Bondi, went for walk around Bondi. And big [cafushle] cafuffle there, and a lady had been swept out and onto the rocks, over near the fishing, where the fishing boats are. Still there, past, this is on the north side.

LW: [Ben Butler].

KH: [Ben Butler], yes, about half way out. And this woman had been dragged out, and North Bondi surfboat lifesavers went out and brought her in. And as she was walking up, they're walking up the beach with her, it was my mother. Anyway, they took her into the room there, and brought her back to life, and that's when I joined North Bondi surf club. That was the reason I joined the North Bondi surf club. I can honestly say I was the worst swimmer in the club and it finished up in the open championship, you had to do 400 meters, 440 - 400 - yards, about ¼ of mile anyway in 8 minutes, and a couple of chaps came out with me, and clocked me, I got about 8.20. and I couldn't get in that year, so I spent the whole winter running up and down the beach to get the condition for swimming, and the following year the same two chaps took me around and they clocked me, and I know I did 8.09 or -10, and they let you pass and I got in, so I was the worst swimmer in the club, and after many years I had a chap, a good coach, Harry Nightingale, heard of him?

LW: I do, I have yes.

KH: He was an Olympic coach, and he had a lovely little girl, a little girl, a school girl, Pat [Norman], Pat, she and I used to train together and she said, "Ken you're the only one who's ever tired me out." So I thought well I can swim now, and during the war, I used to take her to a ball or something like that, we were friends, good close friends, and during the war, I was in charge, not in charge, I was the chief instructor sort of the commander, air force PR [] commando skills and on the weekend I'd go to Melbourne and train there, and I struck her, and I said "Pat!" and she said "Oh Ken." And I said, 'how you're doing?' And she said "Oh, look Ken, I married an air man, a pilot air force pilot and he crashed", - or he was shot down, I've forgotten which "up, right up the top of Australia

and he's going to die in two months time. Can you come down and comfort me?" I said "yes" which I did, and that was that.

And then, when I started at school, I went to about 2-3 headmasters or principles as they call them and this new one came down from Tasmania, I got on well with him because he was a sportsman because he was a high-dive champion of Tasmania and he was captain of the cricket team, the [] football team, the only thing I was cranky about was we'd be watching our rugby union, and he'd be talking about his first 18, and that's not the point, he said "I have a friend, a lovely little girlfriend, she was the first girl to fly a Tigermoth from Melbourne to Tasmania," and I said that was Pat [Norman] and he said yes, so we had that in common.

So then what happened after all that? I don't want to miss any of this, because sometimes I write little notes down and it can lead to stories. I mean a lot of it's a waste I know, but I talk about myself which I don't like doing, however, if I can help you at all.

LW: Do you know...?

KH: Oh, yes. Blue Bottles, oh blue bottles, always blue bottles down there, and in those days we were told to pull the sting off, which made sense, and then rub sand over it. I think there might be a liquid of some sort to put on. I can remember that. Oh, police and thieves. There were always 2 or 3 police down there with costumes on, and we used to sit, I used to sit and talk to them you'd never pick us, we never pick them as police. I remember one day, one of the young chaps said 'come up into the pavilion Ken with me', and he said 'now, here's a photo of So-and-so. Been in jail for thieving, he's down the beach there,' come out and there is he down there.

That was alright. Later on, I struck him at North Bondi. The police were always standing out, they used to have a bell there, the shark alarm, or the police were there if you wanted them. And I was down at North Bondi, and the Modum Operandi was [] one or two of them, drop their towel next to clothes and they'd go for a swim. Looked ok, they'd come back and they'd pick up their towels and they'd be watching the people with their clothes and they'd go for a swim and these chaps would put their towels down, go for a swim again and come back quickly and pick up their towels plus all the goodies, and I saw it. And I quickly got the police and they said "You sure, Ken" and I said 'absolutely certain', and they went down and got the chappie and they took him to court and everything like that.

And I said, 'do I have to go to court?' And they said, 'no, you've told us, we're happy'. So that was another thing, we always had the police here to back us up.

KOS: Was that quite a regular thing, thieving on the beach, you had to really watch for that. So the beach inspectors were the ones to watch for that?

KH: No, no, that wasn't our job, but you did it automatically. And people would come up to me and say, I never had any trouble, but they'd say so-and-so playing up, up there, and we'd go up and so-and-so and say Hey, cut it out mate whatever it was, I don't know. But I never had any troubles like that.

I can remember, blue bottles, thieves, police, and Colin Stubbs, I think I told you about Colin Stubbs, he said you've got a good name in swimming, Ken come over and teach

swimming at my dad's place, with him, that was at the end of my beach inspector, when it was I'm not too sure.

KOS: Do you remember why you stopped, Ken, why you stopped doing those casual shifts as a beach inspector?

KH: Yes, because Colin Stubbs his father owned Northbridge, and Colin was over there coaching, probably on his own, and wanted someone to help him. And I taught swimming, I wasn't coaching, I was taught, Col did all the coaching and I did all the, everyone who came in couldn't swim at all, which I enjoyed, I learned a hell of a lot, and I have met a couple - I was at my son's place up at Noosa, his wife, his wife's sister came up to Sydney for a while, sorry, his wife's sister came up, and said, "ah, Ken you taught me to swim", so after years and years, it all sort of catching up with me... and so that's when I went over there with Colin. Good money. Good money.

KOS: How did you feel about stopping being a beach inspector? That you weren't going to be doing that anymore?

KH: Didn't worry me, because I always down the beach anyway, and the weekends and that. But the thing was I was offered a better job and a bit more money I imagine, and it was something different.

LW: Do you remember what the pre-requisites were, to get a job?

KH: For what?

LW: Did you have to have your Bronze medallion?

KH: Oh yeh, you wouldn't have, I wouldn't have become a beach inspector no way in the world could I got it without that. First thing, you get your bronze, you get your bronze medallion, which I got in 1935. I think the only lie I ever told in my life, I told them I was 16. I was only 15, and got my bronze and for one year there I felt dreadful, you know, I've told a lie and I shouldn't have this.

But anyway, I got through to 16 alright, and then I supposed I was doing patrols, then I was control commander and then I was in the, what do you call it? The March Past team, then I was teaching squads to go through for their bronze medallions. Many years after the war, my wife and I went to England. We were in a little place somewhere or other, and a chap was sitting there, and I sat next to him, he said "Ken Hawthorne?" I said, Hello', John something or other, I said "You know me?" "you taught me my bronze" so that was good, I got a kick out of that. I said, "are you an old Scots boy?" He said, "no I went to Grammar" or Shore, you probably know the names, its just [] so there's a little something or other.

LW: Did you have to be - just getting back to beach inspecting...

KH: Yeh go on...

LW: Did you have to...

KH: Be outstanding...

LW: Be in the know, be in the know, for instance, when I started I was in the North Bondi surf club and I had been a patrol vice captain, and I'd been a junior captain, but because I was known, and my name, I was referred by some of the senior members, I got a start. I got to work as a beach inspector, that was all there was to it back then. So long as you knew someone and they knew of your ability...

KH: That would have been the same as me, there would have been someone - well, Aub and I were in R and R together, you know, yeh, we were in the R and R together so we were very close, and he was the chief beach inspector but that was probably how I would have got the job.

LW: Did you - did you...

KH: Go on...

LW: Did you know um, see there was no swim test. I remember that, there was no test, they just knew you had the ability, you didn't have to be...

KH: Oh, well you were lucky.

LW: There was no timed swim, there was no, nothing in the water that they, such as what they do these days. Where they have the timed...

KOS: You were late 70's weren't you, when you started.

LW: That's right '78.

KOS: So, that's really interesting, because you're talking about 30 years there about really, on-going tradition of seeing beach inspectors and later lifeguards coming, to surf clubs becoming the training grounds, and the kind of sorting them out. And that kind of natural just kind of movement in, that's kind over 30 years, that's really significant, in that role. You know, where did these people come from? What was their background? How did they...?

KH: I would say this, that once you're a lifesaver, you're always a life saver. My wife and I used to go up the Gold Coast somewhere up there for a holiday, and every time I'd say, 'darl, I'm going for a walk', 'yeh, ok' its about a mile and a half walk and all I'm doing when I'm walking, every beach, is looking where the reels are, if anyone gets into trouble. That's all I'd ever be doing, looking for the reels, and now of course, they're obsolete, now I think.

LW: Yes, they've been obsolete since the, oh, since the 70's. They were obsolete when I came on. They were on the beach but they weren't used.

KOS: They weren't being used.

LW: And you didn't use any other type of equipment other than swimming with or without a line.

KH: There's another story.

LW: That's alright.

KH: I thought it was my phone?

LW: No its mine, but we'll ignore it. We'll keep going.

KH: Oh right. Ok. Now there's another story, I forgotten it now... oh yes.

KOS: Do you look at surf conditions, too, when you were saying [in holidays]...

KH: I'd always be aware.

KOS: ...would you look out and see what's running over there...

KH: When you were a beach inspector?

KOS: No no -

KH: Oh, on holidays.

KH: later, when you said you were always a life saver, and so you always looked where your reels were, always looked where safety equipment was, where the patrolled areas, did you always look at the surf and the surf conditions?

KH: Oh, think if you'd always do that. There was an ex-beach inspector, we'll say its another surf club chappie, he'd automatically do it. I was in the middle of something there, something... there about the beach or something, I forgotten it now. I can think of something and forget it half way through. I'm still doing not too bad, I know, for my age, I'm enjoying, I'm enjoying this. Going right back and all this, I just wish I could say when I did it.

Oh this is a story, I used to go up until this year, always go up to Noosa to see my son, I go up in the May holidays, or in May, go for a long walk. This particular day I was down on, I think they call it Sunshine beach, not too sure, and along came the beach inspector, or the professional life saver driving down. And he pulled up near me, and I couldn't resist, I walked over and said 'hello, I'm an ex-beach inspector from Bondi' and we were pals, and I looked at the stuff, and I said 'what's all this?', and he's got a surf board, he's

got a [] they throw out, and I thought, 'oh boy I'm so old fashioned, I don't even know any of these things', and as I say, I felt I was on top of the world in my day, and all of a sudden, now I'm right at the bottom, it doesn't worry me, I get by, but I was on top of the world, you know, five years service, returned serviceman, school teacher, beach inspector, in the lodge, now I've been retired 20 years I can't believe it.

KOS: Ken, how do you think the beach inspectors were viewed when you were working on the beach? Do you think they were viewed with respect by people?

KH: Definitely. Definitely.

KOS: Definitely? It was a prestigious position?

KH: It was more than that. I think it made people feel safe. That's the best way to describe. Oh yes, I was always proud to be a beach inspector.

KOS: Did you get much back-chat from people when you were moving them, it was really -

KH: Mind you I was solid, probably, I used to do a bit of wrestling, and things like that and I think people wouldn't argue with anyone well built. Aub was a big boy. Brian Davidson was built like you, but he was very active. I don't think, no, no, we never had any trouble, except those thieves, which we had the police to back us up, too, see. And no-one knew who the police were, they were just in swimming costumes.

KOS: And they were there under cover quite regularly?

KH: Under cover.

KOS: On the beach... looking for thieves?

KH: All the summer time I believe.

KOS: And any other kind of trouble, do you remember other than thieving? Any social problems, fighting or...?

KH: No in those days, no, I mean I think, just rumours I think, they used to call them the paddo gang, the razor gang. But I never ever saw it. Paddo. No these days, with so many different people in the world at the moment, but ah, look at Cronulla. I mean, its frightening that, that thing at Cronulla is frightening. I think it will all blow over. I don't know what happened with the surf club chap, who got [dobbed]. Don't know whether he said a few words or not, that's what started it all, but I don't think anyone's got anything to worry about when they talk about the Middle East people. They try to work it all out and get over it, but Sydney is a dangerous place at the moment.

KOS: There is something you mentioned earlier, that I'm interested in and that Lawrie is interested in too, and that's the shark fishing, there was shark fishing that went on from the beach.

KH: Oh yes?

KOS: We don't have a lot of information about that and I wondered if you could tell us what you remember.

KH: If I can only think of his name...

LW: Not one of the Platt brothers?

KH: No Bondi surf club, oh look, well known, beautiful swimmer, absolutely beautiful and fast and won a couple of Australian championships. He and Bassingthwaite about the same time.

LW: Oh, ok?

KH: I'll have to think of it

LW: Not Tommy Maher?

KH: No not... Tommy Maher, now that's an old name, he might have been...

LW: He was in charge of the beach before Aub.

KH: Yes!

LW: But he went to war, like yourself.

KH: That's right, I wrote the name down then didn't I, I wrote down Jim Lapthorne.

LW: Tommy Maher, was the captain. Later on he became the president of the surf club, but he was in charge of the beach when Stan McDonald retired.

KH: That's right.

LW: Until the beginning of the war, when he joined the armed forces and went to New Guinea.

KH: I'm just trying to think...

KOS: We had some photos but we don't have much in terms of the stories of the shark fishing.

KH: Ah, look his name will come to me, I hope, I hope. His father when I was a kid was always fishing on Bondi for sharks. He was well known, not Jim, and always of a nighttime, after dark or something like that. I can remember one night when I was down there and when he hooked a shark, I can remember we got on the rope and pulled the shark out. I can remember one of my teachers at school, its just a story from there, he said, 'I remember him', he said, 'I went out there to help pull the rope in' and someone said, 'watch out for the shark', and someone said to me 'which one', as I pulled my shark in, there was another one following it in.

That's a story, and ah, you wouldn't remember one of the chap in the surf club, [] this is his uncle I'm talking about. I put this chappie through a course in the air force, I was in charge of courses and when this job came back after the war at Scotts, one was a PE teacher or something or other, he said to his uncle, David Radd, who was the art teacher, 'Uncle David', he said, 'I got the bloke for you, Ken Hawthorne', that's how I was interviewed and got the job, I had all the qualifications and everything, but it was through that. Vel Frack. Does that ring a bell with you?

LW: No.

KH: That's the chappie I just put through the course. Don't know why I've just mentioned his name...

LW: The surname Frack rings a bell

KH: Frack - I don't know if he's still alive or not, he got me the job, [] my job, I've lost track over the last 40 years or 50 years of him. Ah, good bloke.

LW: Tell me, did ah, board riding, see board riding was always around since the 1920's, the big solid redwood boards, but had it taken off when you were working on the beach?

KH: Oh, there were a couple of good riders, in our club, now wait on, hang on... there was a good chap from your club, oh, I'm sorry, from Bondi Surf club. He was a champion, I can't remember his name now, he and another chappie were about the only two board riders, and believe it or not I had a little canoe, and we used to sort of go in the canoes, down at North Bondi, and there was this movie star, well known but I can't remember his name.

KOS: An Australian star?

KH: No, an American, and he came out here and left his surf board with Bass, and it was a long one and I have a feeling it might have been light wood or something like balsa or something like that. And we used to go out and come in on it. You know when he wasn't there, when he was doing a film or something, he said you can use it, but that is all I can remember, surf boards.

LW: You didn't have any problems with board riders, when you were on the beach working?

KH: No, they had to keep away from the flags I can remember that.

LW: I know in later years, when board riding really boomed, we had a lot of problems, Aub would have as well, going into the 60's and 70's.

KH: I'm talking to you now, and I'm forgetting that you were a beach inspector...so...

LW: 20 years,

KH: I'm talking about me... you still are?

LW: No I was, for 20 years.

KH: Oh, you're not now, 20 years.

LW: I'm still with the council, but I'm not working on the beach any longer.

KOS: Don't worry, ken I'm going to interview Lawrie.

KH: 20 years, 86, I retired, about 20 years ago.

LW: I won't be able to shut up. Do you remember Bluey Mays?

KH: Bluey Mays - is the one I'm thinking of.

LW: Tell us a bit about Bluey.

KH: Yeh, well, all I can tell you about Bluey is, Bluey Mays, I think, I don't want to get him mixed up with someone else now. Bluey Mays, I think sat with a group with guitars on the beach... no, no, no, I'm getting him mixed up with someone else now.

LW: Oh, you could be right.

KH: He owned Balmoral, this is coming, he owned the café at Balmoral, when my daughter got married, we went there, Bluey Mays? Bluey Mays?

LW: The Bluey Mays that I'm talking about, he was in the North Bondi surf club, he was a boat sweep, he was a board paddler, he was a board rider, and he was one of the first down at the beach to sport the [Cornell Wilde] hair.

KH: When I was up at Noosa there one May, he was in charge of a crew, I think rowing around Australia. Does that ring a bell?

LW: Could do?

KH: Yeh he was in charge of that. I think he moved up north, in one of the beaches around Caloundra or somewhere like that. And of course he shone as a sweep, then he picked a crew, I'm pretty sure he rowed around Australia. I'm pretty sure - I know a boat did, a surf boat.

LW: That might have been Spaz Hurst?

KH: Ah, you're right. Spaz Hurst.

LW: Spaz Hurst rowed a boat from Sydney to the Coolangatta, to the surf lifesaving championship of Australia, in Coolangatta.

KOS: Up the coast? Row, row, row your boat?

LW: Up the coast.

KH: What did you say?

LW Spaz - Keith Hurst.

KH: Yes, Spaz. Poor old Spaz.

LW: He didn't work on the beach.

KH: No, he joined the police force, Spaz.

LW: Did he?

KH: I think. I think he did, there was another chappie, joined the police force. Came down in his uniform proud as can be, one Sunday and that's right, and anyway, one of the members of the club said 'Ken he can't be a policeman, he's suffers from asthma', or something or other, I said, 'oh yeh he does too', anyway not through that remark but they found out, and he lost his uniform. That wasn't Spaz, it was someone else.

LW: Gordon Cunningham, maybe?

KH: No, I was the last person to see his dad alive. I used to go down there and train, at the gym or something down there, and this Thursday or whenever it was, I went down there and his dad was a policeman, and he was a heavy-weight boxing champion and I saw him and we spoke to each other. He got on a tram to go up to the Junction or somewhere I forgotten the story now, and he got off the tram, on Bondi road and the tram was doing something like about half a kilometer an hour, and he tripped and fell over, hit his head and died. I was the last at the surf club, and then from there his sons were the [] at the club, and they know me to look at, but we never speak to each other because we're in different age groups. Then one of them finished up a policeman, in charge of ah...

LW: Waverley.

KH: Waverley.

LW: Craig, Craig Cunningham.

KH: Craig. And the younger one.

LW: One's recently passed away, tragically.

KH: Really? I read that somewhere, and then Mum had a baby in her womb when, at the time of the death, something like that, it's a long story. I know I was the last one to see him alive at the surf club, and one of the sons, might have been, oh, wasn't born, the baby wasn't born, that's what it was, whose the baby? The youngest one, he's probably about 40-50 years of age, but he was the baby, he hadn't, he wasn't born at that particular time.

KOS: Ken, I know that you said you did active service during the war and that you came onto the beach, toward the end of the 40's or after the war. Do you remember anyone talking about what conditions were like on the beach, during the war?

KH: No.

KOS: What the beach inspectors were doing, what their role was?

KH: No, I know that there was, I knew all the champion swimmers before the war, I swam against them, [services] I know one chappie, I remember his name, he was Manly surf club, he was in the army, somewhere along the coast line up there in Africa. Naturally he was a real goer, and he organised a surf carnival. I can remember that, he was a life saver. Champion swimmer, I can't remember his name. He was from Manly surf club

KOS: But you don't remember anything about the beach, because you came just after that period, people saying, 'oh, you know, five years ago during the war' what it was like, or whether people were on the beach much.

KH: So what was the original question?

KOS: What was the role of beach inspectors during the war?

KH: I don't know, I wasn't here.

KOS: You don't know. You weren't there. I just thought you might remember.

KH: No.

KOS: So post-war, late 40's you were starting to work as a casual beach inspector. Can you paint me a bit of picture of what the beach looked like, who was coming to the beach, kind of crowds were there?

KH: Oh yes, I can remember, its very confusing, I'd remember you'd see Sunday's, or Monday's paper, "the crowd Bondi, big hot Sunday", they'd say 100,000 people, how they knew that I don't know, then later on it was 50,000, 60,000

KOS: But phenomenal crowds?

KH: Big crowds

KOS: Huge crowds and was Sunday the big day?

KH: I'd say yes, yes, always Sunday, and the beach inspectors were always held in awe, you know, as they should be, just like a policeman.

KOS: So you were very busy, if you think, 100,000 people, that's a very large town.

KH: But, no. I'd say all I had to do was be there in case anything went wrong and I'd just walk up and down the beach, you know with a big crowd like that, moving out to watch the kiddies, making sure the kiddies were ok, just looking...

KOS: And what kind of numbers of beach inspectors would you have rostered on for that size of the crowd?

KH: Only two, but then we had two patrols - Bondi and North Bondi patrols were on the beach and each patrol I imagine, I don't know, maybe, 7-8-9-10 or something like that, These days they've got girls in, and of course to me, I think god, how can a girl get in a belt and swim out, but there are no belts, ah, reels now, and they've got these things they throw out, 'hang on, and I'll pull you in'. I could understand the girls doing that but I couldn't understand the girls going out in the seas I had to go in. I mean, I'm not being mannish now, but you know, its pretty hard going, and I was in plenty of surf races and belt races where I rode for, I trained my first year when I couldn't swim much, in the boat. Trained a whole year, I was the [bow]. Have you heard of Kenny Weekes?

LW: Yes, he's Wally Weekes son.

KH: Old Wally, [] anyway I'd be rowing out Bondi, "don't look behind, Hawthorne, don't look behind, don't look behind" and then 'bang' and that was alright and we went over to Cronulla after training for the whole year, got in the boat, went out. A big wave hit us and tipped the boat was up like this, and that was all of us, that was after a year's training, so I did row on the boat too.

KOS: Do you remember post-the war, there was a lot of post-war migration to Australia and largely European, and that was a big social change, mainly for Sydney and

Melbourne, because when people came they went to Sydney and Melbourne. Do you remember seeing that on the beach? That there were people...

KH: Not particularly

KOS: You don't remember anything like that? Language issues?

KH: No, no I was, ah, put this way, I was too busy I was always busy at school. I don't think anyone ever worked harder than me, I loved it, you know every Saturday, I used to have to make a month ahead, 33 teams to play against Shore, they take 15, we take 15, I'd have to allocate the grounds. I'd have to allocate the referees. I trained the referees, I did, and they became old boys, and they'd always kept in touch, and they'd come out and I'd have to make sure all that was done, then I'd go on Saturday morning I'd go round and make sure all the fieldsman had turned up maybe [] whatever, then I'd go back to school and I'd referee a game myself and I always had a team. I coached a team and I'd watch that, and then in the afternoon, if the [whole], shall we say were playing Shore, you have to heard of Shore, they'd all come over, thousands you know and I had to look after the sports master, the headmaster, and ah my day's always full.

KOS: And when did you go to the beach? Were you going, doing training on the weekend?

KH: Well, I would have gone down swimming, oh, that's right there's another point there, I didn't put in time back in the surf club swimming, I supposed as a lot of people would think I should have done but I did put in at the Bondi Diggers swimming club. I had 60 years of that, and I finished up as the president for 8 years. So I did put my time back into swimming. And in that time I didn't see much of the surf club.

KOS: What about in the 50's[60's?] what was happening in Bondi, did you see a kind of growth of a kind of youth culture, in the 50's [60's]?

KH: No, that's when I came back. Ah, no, it was sort of a new world to me.

KOS: What about those kind of legendary characters like Bea Miles, and Bondi Mary, did you have any contact with them down on the beach? How did the beach inspectors deal with them?

KH: Not on the beach, no, but I remember jumping on trams, and from what I can gather she was a university student who'd just gone a bit crackers over studying. This is what I've heard, yes I got on a tram once, they used to have tram guards, or tram something...

KOS: Tram conductors?

KH: Tram conductors, and they'd walk along the outside and I can remember her jumping on, trying to think back now...

KOS: On the running board?

KH: No I'm trying to think how we sat, and she jumped in and sort of played around, did something [] silly, and along came the, what do you call it, the collector?

KOS: Tram conductor?

KH: Conductor, and she jumped off and that was in Rushcutters Bay and that was the only time I ever saw her but she was always in the news.

KOS: The reason I ask is that she particularly liked Bondi Beach and she used to swim off the beach and there's a story where she brought a lamb on to the beach one day and tied it up, and Aub Laidlaw told her to take it away and she pointed out that the signs said there were no dogs on the beach and she was talking about lambs but she'd left a sheep tied up. So it was just those kind of things.