

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

Interview with Warren Riley (WR)

Interviewer 1: Lawrie Williams (LW)

Interviewer 2: Elida Meadows (EM)

Interviewer 3: Damon Maloney (DM)

LW: It's the 10th of August 2001, and Elida Meadows, myself Lawrie Williams and Damon Maloney, talking with Warren Riley who is a longtime member of Bronte Surf Club and a recent life member, would that be right?

WR: Fair while ago, yes, 70, I think I was made life member, Bronte, yes.

LW: A long serving member of the Surf Club and a member of the local community and Warren's father Roger Riley was a long serving chief beach inspector, at Bronte from 1928, until probably the late 1940's...

WR: Over past that, I think, probably you know, mid-50's, I'm pretty sure.

LW: Over 25 years, a lot of experience...

Warren, can you talk to us about some of the recollections you may have of your father in his occupation as a beach inspector. Perhaps some of the stories, or some of the things you remember...

WR: Well he was a very dedicated... he was dedicated to the fact that he was a beach inspector. He prided himself on being a beach inspector, and he took the thing very seriously. There was no nonsense on the beach at Bronte while he was there. Even if I was playing up you'd get a kick up the backside.

He used to work – I don't know what his hours were at the time, but he would work to the end of his hours then he'd do a sort of a walk [?], and when I was on the [pit], we'd go for a walk around from the... northern end of the beach around to the point, and you know, make sure that everything was alright. In fact in those times, you used to see a lot of... you'd see a lot of sharks.

In those days, and we were only remarking about it the other day, in those days they used to have huge schools of salmon come into Bronte. And if it was a sort of dusky type of night, they come in, honestly a big black stain right through the beach of Bronte. And you could wait longer, and if it was moonlight, you could see the sharks going through the middle of them.

EM: Wow.

BC: He'd do that, and he was sort of there till quite late, and he really treasured that job. And he took it very seriously.

LW: Where did you live at the time?

WR: We lived in Pacific street, Bronte, which runs parallel to Bronte road, whatever it is down near Macpherson..., Bronte road, one back from the beach, so it was only a couple minutes walk down to the beach. We were there for ah... from the time that I was born, till about 19'... Dad died in '64, and we were there for another – my wife and I stayed on there for another 4-5 years.

LW: What year were you born in?

WR: '36.

LW: So, what are the sorts of recollections you have of the area when you were growing up there?

WR: Oh, it was fabulous, fabulous place... The good thing about Bronte was that there was not a lot of through-traffic in those days, and there was no hotel in the area so you know, we didn't have any dramas at all around the place.

It was a very [quiet?] almost like a little village type of arrangement, and all the local kids used to go down to the park, and we'd have touch football games all morning, Saturday morning and Sunday morning, and everyone was in the surf club or the amateur swimming club. And the guys like the [Thornets], and Kevin [Juney], at a later date, and friends of mine that were there that were good swimmers like John Donahue, and Roger [Boswave] and the Quentin boy and the two Walkers who were all Australian Surf Champions were there.

So it was a terrific place to grow up, it was a fabulous place to grow up, and the fact that he was the Beach inspector, meant that I spent a lot of time and I'm always (laughter) at the bloody skin specialist now getting things cut out... as a result...

LW: I think my time is coming too...(laughter)

WR: Yes your time will come, don't worry about that... (laughter)

WR: I spent hours and hours... But it was terrific. He was a bit of a celebrity. He was a very good swimmer. He won about 7 club surf championships, after the age of 30-something. He was 35, or something when he started... '28? He was born in [1893, 1897] something like that, anyway, he went there 28, and he won 7 senior surf championships, so he was winning them in his '40's, when he was in his 40's.

He was a great swimmer, and actually in one of those photos, a photo where he got a great deal of publicity, which we don't have unfortunately, but he made a couple of fabulous rescues. It was... They had a black day, at [?] They had this one at Bronte when they had their first surf carnival, and they were picking them up, the Captain Cook, and everything, was picking them up at sea. And he did a couple of massive rescues in that...

LW: When you say the Captain Cook, what do you mean?

WR: It was an old captain, an old sort of cutter type boat, that was like the... it was like a patrol boat, I suppose. They sent it out of the heads, to come round and pick people that were getting... they were all getting sucked out in that corner rip... You know right round the back...

LW: Oh, the Bronte express...round at...[the circuit].

WR: Mmm, it went further out, it was a massive sea. And he, - I'll try, there's some stuff around, you know, probably in that Heroes of the Surf... or something like that about that carnival.

LW: He would have received some form of commendation or?

WR: I don't think he did. He got something. I'll have a look at home. He got something but it wasn't for that. He did a couple of great rescues, at Bronte. He got one, I think it might have been that [name?] one or something like that.

LW: Did he work by himself, all that time at Bronte?

WR: Yeh, there was no one else there.

LW: And there was someone at Tamarama? From your recollection?

WR: I don't even know that there was someone at Tamarama, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Oh, yeh, there would have been. Bill Peele, I think was at Tamarama.

LW: Bill Peele was in that photograph which was pre-war.

WR: Yeh, Tamarama. So, yeh, he really loved his work. In those days, the beach inspector was really a bit of a celebrity, and people respected him enormously. Like being the local policeman or something like that...

LW: Did he work in very closely with [Dinny] Brown from the Surf Sheds...

WR: Yeh, they were great mates.

LW: ...because [Dinny] was the first Beach Inspector.

WR: Yeh, they were always together, In fact, we all worked for [Dinny] Brown at some stage, carrying his surfo's and all that sort of stuff.

LW: So you knew both the daughters?

WR: Oh, yeh, yeh. In fact I was at a function recently, oh, actually it was a funeral, unfortunately. And I met Betty, I'm not sure if it was Betty or the other girl.

LW: Elizabeth Buck is Betty...

EM: Margaret is the other one.

WR: She looks amazing. She is quite, she'd be a pretty good age.

LW: She does, they were both up here last week and they both look remarkable for their age.

WR: Yeh. Yeh.

EM: I was just wondering about, you know, the little train at Bronte that was such a feature when I was a kid growing up there. Was that there when your father [?]

WR: No, that came later on, yeh. Don't know if he'd even been there when that came...

EM: Right, so it was that recent?

WR: Yeh.

EM: And he would have been involved in rescues almost weekly wouldn't he...

WR: There were a lot of rescues at Bronte.

EM: I wasn't allowed to swim or surf in Bronte when I was a kid, because of the rip.

WR: He was the man for the job, though.

EM: Was he...

DM: So he'd work Monday to Friday, would he, and then the life saving club...?

WR: Yeh, I don't think he worked... I think he worked weekdays. I'm pretty sure it was only weekdays.

DM: I think that came up in the last conversation we had with Elizabeth and Margaret that... Saturday mornings or something, then the surf club did the Saturday afternoon, at one o'clock...

WR: May be he did, I can't remember, it might have been, too. Might have been. Yeh, worked Saturday mornings, too...

DM: They came on [patrol].

LW: Probably to allow them to go to a carnival on Saturday and return and put a patrol on the beach.

EM: Would you have gotten people, was it like Bondi, because you had the tram going down there, did you have people from all over Sydney coming [down] like it is now?

WR: Oh, yes, because, yes it was a terrific area for families, because old [Dingy] Brown used to hire those canvas tents out? If you fold them up and flatten them they'd come out like that shape, and ah, the park you know [?], we've got no conception of what crowds were on the beach, these days as to what they were in those..., you couldn't get on the beach on Bronte in those days on a nice day.

I live over at Manly now and you know, you get a beautiful summer day and you could run races between them, there's very few people go to the beach there. Don't know if its that skin cancer scare, or all that baloney that went on was about the sewer and all that sort of stuff, there's not a lot of people sort of go to the beach, as they did in those days. And we attended hundreds of people, thousands of people.

DM: And I guess they'd spill over into all the park area, up the gulley...

WR: Yes, we always spent time, even ourselves, we'd go down. But there's a real cosmopolitan type, even in those days, there were a lot of people from all over Sydney came down.

I mean it ended right up into the park, like up to the gulley, because they had all those little sheds? Those little, like, sun-sheds they called them in those days, timber sheds, they were all the way through the park, up to the gulley, and they sort of finished down to where East Court is, you know and there is a big rotunda there and that was about the end of it. Kids... It used to be chokkas.

EM: It was a bit wilder, then, though wasn't it... it wasn't quite so...

WR: It was a lovely area, you know kids had the merry-go-rounds, and all that sort of stuff. It was a lovely place to go...

EM: Were people doing the coastal walk then, from Bronte to Bondi?

WR: I don't think so as much, I don't think it was sort of as,... people certainly walked around there. And later on they had a run from Bronte, they used to run around... but I don't recall that?

EM: Well, it's really popular now...

WR: I wonder when that path went along Mackenzie's...?

EM/LW: Point? Not too sure...?

WR: That would be interesting to find out.

DM: But now, I mean you...

WR: But see that whole area, when I was first there, that area on where [Rod] Curl is, there wasn't too many houses on that, I'll tell you...

LW: That's Bronte Marine Drive...

WR: And further back was... nothing. In fact, he told me once, that he could have bought an acre of land up there for five pounds...

EM: Really? Wow!

DM: Up on the headlands there... ?

WR: Between Bronte and Tamarama...

DM: This is your father, is it?

WR: Yeh!

LW: Would have been a nice investment these days!

EM: Do you remember the cemetery when you were a kid?

WR: Yeh!

EM: Did you spend much time there?

WR: Oh! We used to love playing in the cemetery, yeh. Up at,... On that rocky face, you know where the [Cutty] is now, there were a lot of little caves and, on that... where the baths is, we used to sneak into the Baths by going down the back there, and all round that face, there were sort of little caves... and as a kid we used to spend a heap of time up there, and play round the cemetery and fish all along that back thing there...

EM: Yeh, what sort of fish did you catch?

WR: Mainly blackfish and drummer, and rock cod of course...

LW: I remember, you know, even when I was young, there were times we'd go out to Waverley Cemetery and catch lizards. There were... lots of things like Blue Tongues lizards and large skinks, which no longer exist up there. You're lucky to get a lizard that's longer than your baby – than your little finger. Do you recall all that?

WR: Yeh, one of my great mates is a Chinese guy. Well, Australian, of Chinese background. The Loh's, you know the Loh's from Bronte... ?

LW: I do...

WR: Well Rob and I grew up, we're the same age and we sort of used to play together a [great deal], lots of kids my age in Bronte at that time. And, we used to go down, you can dive, swim out the back of the men's bogey, and get, bloody ah... we never knew anything about it, we used to get it, abalone, throw the abalone away and polish up the shells and take them home as um... ashtrays.

DM: Yeh, I remember having that, too..

WR: And there was miles of abalone there, it was just thick. And he couldn't... his parents used to give us a couple of bob to bring abalone home, because we never knew, you could, (laughter) we wouldn't eat it... but they ate it...

LW: And lobsters... ?

WR: Never saw too many lobsters, but miles of fish. There's an old guy called Owen Skelton, it's a shame you can't get him, he'd be well in his 80's. He was renowned as the fisherman around the place. And in big sea, he would come and just stand on the end of the baths and cast into the bogey hole, and keep magnificent [brim] and blackfish... The place was just a... it was a beautiful place, it was very nostalgic thinking about Bronte. Great Place.

DM: And you were with the Surf Club. Obviously you were a life member so you would have been part of the carnivals...

WR: Yeh, carnivals... in fact I joined Tamarama in 1948 because I couldn't get into Bronte. They used to accept you into Tamarama when you were 12.

DM: Oh, ok...

WR: You were that desperate to get in. And then we come from there straight around to Bronte, at 14.

DM: Oh, right...

WR: I got my bronze... my qualifying certificate in 1950... yeh, 14...

DM: Then, you were doing patrols?

WR: Oh yeh...

DM: Along Bronte?

WR: Yeh.

DM: Did they have any surf carnivals at Bronte?

WR: They tried one in this year, but they made all the rescues,

DM: [?]

WR: ... and they had a massive sea,... and then they were loathe to let them come back there... but they did then start having a few of those like, Waverley shields... which is like a round robin thing between us and...

LW: ... (like) golf... the local surf clubs...

WR: ... the two Bondi's and Tamarama. Then they got a bit more confident with it and they had a couple of surf carnivals at Bronte but they were... it's too narrow.

DM: I've got a picture of one carnival, and I was told that that might have been the only full-blown carnival that was ever held there...

WR: No, [?] they had a massive problem with it. Then I think they had one quite a bit later on, that I was involved in, I know. Then they didn't go back there.

DM: Right

WR: They had a boat race and all the boats would go on to the north point and all that sort of stuff. (laughter)

EM/DM: (laughter).

WR: They had a lot of that.

LW: Now, your dad came from the North of Queensland, is that right?

WR: Yeh, Mackay...

LW: Mackay, and tell us a bit about his background, and why he came to Sydney and where he lived here...

WR: Well, he came down, he came with his two brothers. They couldn't get any work up there. Their family up there, were, later on in life they owned the city engineering works there, they did very well, in the end. There was no work in Mackay. So they came down. He got a job on the wharves, actually, originally. As a wharfie, and his brother Vince might have done the same. I think they all three of them, the other bloke was Dan.

Then they went to Cronulla, to live and they joined the surf club at Cronulla, and it wasn't long before they got – I don't know whether they got enough money – they probably went out there because it was cheap to live. Then they got enough money they came back to the eastern suburbs way.

Vince and Dan lived around Coogee way, and Dad lived at Paddo... I think... and they used to go down to Coogee surf club then. And that was – they won a few R & R's and you'll see some race results in there where he represented Coogee. I think.

And then he got offered, he was always, sort of wanted to be a beach inspector so he put in for a job at Bronte, obviously and he got the job, and ah, that's when he came.

And we moved in to Pacific St. Well, they lived up in Bronte in Macpherson street actually, there's an old block of flats, don't know if they're still there, called the [Ewon] flats. If you're coming down, well, if you're going up from the beach, on the left hand side there, he said they were down, it's probably been blown away, and Big units in there now, but, very old sort of, strange looking block of flats and they lived in there and then they got the place in Pacific street, they were there for, oh well, until he died. So they there were, for um, '64, what's that, 28, '36 to '64, is 28years.

LW: Was there anyone, just going back to his job as a beach inspector, was there anyone there before him at Bronte, or was he the first appointed...?

WR: I can't recall...

LW: Does the name, Mr Rowbottom ring a bell?

WR: No, no...

LW: No? Because I know that one of Dave Brown, or [Dinny] Brown's daughters mentioned the name Rowbottom.

WR: Yeh, but I don't know the name, no...

LW: Ok, but by and large he would have been the only beach inspector there in all that time...

WR: Yeh...

LW: All those years... it's a long time to serve alone...

WR: Yeh...Well, he loved it... he just loved it...

EM: So during the war years, he was too old, already, to go...

WR: He tried to get in but they wouldn't have him, so I assume he continued on through the war, I can't differentiate. But he was there, you know, all the way through.

LW: And you went to Waverley College?

WR: Yeh.

LW: Do you have any brothers or sisters.

WR: No, I was an only child. They didn't have me til they were quite late. He was ah, what would he have been... I was born in 1936, he'd have been 40-odd, 43? Dad was born in 1893, so he would have been 43 years of age, and [?].

DM: What did the beach inspectors, like, obviously their role was to make rescues, as required. Were they also doing other duties, like throughout the park, by doing any other sort of enforcement-type duties, do you know of... like controlling...?

WR: I don't think there'd be a necessity... they were pretty tough on, you know, you couldn't get out of hand, you know he was a bit of a hard sort of an old buggar, (laughter) and you know, it was 'his beach' sort of thing, he had that attitude. It was his beach and anyone who wanted to 'play up' there, got a kick up the bum (laughter) and out.

He was, they were tough, I mean they were all tough. I got booted off Bondi by old [?] (laughter), he knew the old man but it didn't make any difference.

We went down there, I used to go down there after school with a team of guys. We were throwing a football around, or kicking a football around, he said 'that's not allowed' and we let him go for about half an hour and we started again, he give us a big kick up the bum and "I know your old man, but that's not going to do you any good. Buzz off." (laughter).

They were pretty tough and they were expected to be. I think, that was the deal.

LW: These days at Bronte with it being such a small beach, there are problems at times in keeping the local and outside, local board riders a distance from the swimmers, in the flags. Was that ever a problem for him in his time?

WR: I don't think so...

LW: So board riding didn't become popular at Bronte...

WR: No, no it wouldn't have. He might have been a bit lucky, because short boards came in about '56 or something like that. And he'd been gone by then, I would have thought. He wouldn't have tolerated it, I can tell you...
(laughter)

He wouldn't even let them train like, in the flags with the long boards, and a lot of guys fellows like Billy Wallace, there was a bit of a [?] in to those blokes... if they...

LW: [Serge] Denman?

WR: I don't know if Denman was there, he would have probably just been there...

LW: Well, Denman became a beach inspector sometime later...

WR: He did... Yeh, I remember Denman well... He was a classic...

LW: Do you remember any of the other beach inspectors after your father?

WR: Oh, yeh, there were... they were all quite, there was... I tell you about Jimmy Riley might have been a beach inspector after Dad, maybe not. Trying to think, no, Jimmy Riley...

His brother, eh, his cousin was a fellow called Terry Riley, and he was a beach inspector at Bronte for a while,

I think it went like, say – I think Dad, then Terry Riley, there was someone else, I'm sure, I can't remember, then there was Billy Wallace, was there for quite a while. Then I think Denman might have come in, I'm sure there was someone else...

LW: Alec Menzies came in around 1968, that was quite late...

WR: Yeh he was after, he was after Denman. Maybe, he wouldn't have been far after Denman.

LW: Yes, I think Alec just caught the last 2 years of Aub Laidlaw and retired, unwillingly in 1970...

WR: Yeh, I've had a funny encounter with [old Denman]... (laughter)
He, no I'm sure, I think Terry Riley probably followed my Dad in there, then there was...
Billy Wallace, I'm sure Wallace was there for quite a few years.

LW: You say that your father worked alone. When in those days, you consider that the method of rescue they used primarily was the belt-line and reel... what would happen, do you know in those circumstances, where he may have to use that, would he get assistance from people from the Surf Club...?

WR: Yeh, and anyone on the beach. I think he'd just tell them to pay it out...

LW: ... and feed the line and work the reel...?

WR: Yeh...

LW: I suppose, if he didn't have that assistance he would have to go out...

WR: On his own...

LW: ...on any of devices...

WR: He did a lot of that, I'm sure, yeh I remember that. And that's not difficult if you know a bit about Bronte, if they go out in that rip, you've only got to swim a bit to the side and you're out of it... and how you'd get it back I suppose is another question. But ah, I'm sure they would have done that...

Generally speaking in those days, there were a lot of people, there were a lot of people – there was always someone down the beach I think, whether it was because they weren't working, or, I think there was always someone around the place, that I can recall in my time, there was always a team down there down at the beach.

LW: Just socially, when your Dad finished work, what are the things he would do after hours; there was no local pub down that way, Bondi Junction was the nearest place...

WR: He might go up, occasionally go up to the Charo', the Robin Hood, and have a few beers with a team of blokes...

LW: Catch a tram up there?

WR: Catch a tram – we never had a car, never had a car or a phone, so, he just used to catch a tram, I think that was basically it, and have a few beers... He was a big into the "splashers", he always was a splasher and he was always sort of promoting us. I don't think he ever took a position at the amateurs. But he was always there of a Saturday morning or Sunday morning, when they swam and so yeh, that'd be about all. He was a pretty simple sort of a guy. And ah, read a few books and things like that, that'd be about it.

EM: So he was on his own, you were saying, they separated.

WR: Later on, I think they broke up in '46 – '47...

EM: And what? You stayed with your dad?

WR: No, I didn't... Then I came back later on, when I got... because my Mum and her new husband moved to Balmain.

EM: Oh, yeh, good old Balmain...

WR: [that didn't really excite me as much]

EM: So did you stay at Waverley College though during this time?

WR: Yeh,

EM: You did. So you traveled from Balmain to Waverley College?

WR: Yeh, we were in a couple of places, but where was the other place? Sydenham or somewhere, they had shops and I went to Waverley from there.

EM: What was Waverley College like, back then... tough old brothers?

WR: Pretty good... yeh very tough. We could do with a few around now... (laughter)... My daughter keeps saying 'you can't hit the kids' and all that, but Jesus, I'd have love her to have been up there with a few of those blokes...

LW: Brother Lacey...

WR: Lacey was my principal, and a bloke called, um,... I went to St Charles first...

EM: I went to St Charles...
(laughter)

WR: ...I went to St Charles, and got a bursary from there in year, like the sixth class. Had a bloke there called O'Connor, Luke O'Connor, a bloody sadist... god, he was a tough man... crazy...

EM: Well, we had a nun like that St Charles...

WR: They couldn't get away with it now... a fair while ago I went to a bit of a reunion thing, and ran into a few of the brothers that taught me. And in fact my son was taught by a bloke called Murphy who was the sports master at Waverley when I was there, and also a guy called Shanahan, Rusty Shanahan and he was a pretty liberal type of a guy. He was at St Pius, my son. And the last 2 years for a period they made them co-ed, and I was talking about the co-ed. He thought it was a great idea.

Lot of them wouldn't, and a lot of them couldn't stand it... although I did talk to, at this re-union. one bloke that I never thought would be able to handle anything like that, was the principal of a co-ed school in Victoria, and he said, 'you just got to face it, it's going to be here...' So...

EM: I don't know about Waverley College, though, I don't think they'll be going co-ed...

WR: They probably won't, but I mean, I think the brothers, not that there would be that many of them left...

EM: No, there's not...

WR: ...but they can handle it a bit better now, because they're a lot more liberal minded...

I was always in strife with the brothers, and you know I got complaints from some [woman], I was harassing her daughter and I got a caning, across the bum. From that

Brother Lacey. I tell you what, [fives.]... the people today wouldn't tolerate that. They'd be in court.

EM: When you had the reunion, did you go back to the school?

WR: No, we had it at East Leagues Club actually... it was long while ago, but it was fun, it was great. Wish they'd do it again, actually to see who's around.

EM: They might do, you should ring them up and suggest it...

DM: To get back to Bronte again, when your dad was working there, would he have been working out of the club, I suppose?

WR: No, they had a little... they had a beach inspector's room. If you've got a photo of the old club, it was like a [] sort of thing with columns in the middle, it was... the ambulance room that they used, that the beachies used to use that as their... They'd put their gear in there. I mean, they used it obviously quite a bit of the time with people, but that was their sort of room.

DM: And that would have been at the front of the club, I suppose...?

WR: Right at the front. If you looked at it, it was on the southern side, right... it had joined [Dingy] Browns' sheds. Like, there was an alley way, where you'd go into the showers, but that was the last part of the building, and it was below the floor level... You walked up say a dozen stairs to get into the building, and it was on the ground level, and the beachies always used that room, they continued to use that room as long as I can remember...

LW: Until the club...

WR: Until the club got unfortunately, got burned down...

LW: When was that?

WR: Gees, I wouldn't know... I'd left here, I'd been in Manly, the early '70's I suppose, wouldn't it?

LW: We have a picture of the pile of bricks that were redeemed from the burned out building and it looks to be a 1970's shot... early 1970's.

WR: It's a shame, because that club house was a fabulous... the new one's not worth 2-bob...

DM: (laughter) I'd have to agree...

LW: It certainly had the appearance that perhaps say, Bondi Surf Club does, with the columns at the front, the classical appearance...

WR: And the whole of the, the core of that thing was everyone used to come here and sit on the stairs. And that was where every one... all the photos that were taken of the members of the surf clubs, were on the stairs, and that's really where life was... on the stairs. But, other than that, to go inside it was a beautiful big open area, and you could have your own little peg, it was one of those places, it was a big hall, and they just slapped seating all the way around the hall, so there was no problem with space... and the walls were covered in pictures...

DM: And the sheds were to the south... of the, to the south of the club?

WR: Yeh to the south...

DM: Right, okay.

LW: What about the Bronte Dance, the first Bronte Dance?

WR: Fabulous...

LW: How far back do you remember it?

WR: I used to sneak down there and have a look through the window when I was a kid... that was going, I don't know how long ago that went, but it was certainly going in the...before the war, or just after the war, then it died a bit, it stopped. Then we started a Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon thing down there, when Col Joy came down...

EM: Oh Wow!

WR: It caused a lot of trouble, blues...

EM: Yeh, that was a show last night talking about that...

DM: I was watching that last night on the ABC, Col Joy...

WR: He filled... he used to filled the place...

DM: And that would be in the surf club?

WR: Yeh, You could get, they must've got you know 1500 into the place. It was wall to wall.

In fact I remember when they used to lock the side gate, it was winter time, and they used to lock that side gate because you know, the people sneak up the side and come in. We were out riding our surf boards, and it was bitterly cold, and no wet suits. We froze and

we came in. And by the time we got through from the front door into the dressing sheds we were sweating...it was just...

EM: Did you have those like, gangs, the Bodgies and that sort of thing...

WR: No, we had a lot of trouble, because, there were sort of, the [Greeks] came from the western suburbs. A famous thing, there was a big blue and it was in the papers, and they,[...] they called them bikies, I think in that day, and they came down, and our blokes got into them in the park and there were chains and god knows what, and it was a big one... it made the papers...

LW: And that was in the '50's?

WR: Yeh, fifties or early '60's, or something I'm thinking. No it was probably was in the 50's. Let me think about that. I tell you, Col Joy, got, no, sorry, John Raper got Col Joy to the place, because he joined the club when he was 17.

EM: The footballer?

WR: Footballer, so that would have been 17, he was born in 1957, yeh... be that sort of thing I reckon...

LW: What did they do for grog... did they actually serve grog in the hall... ?

WR: No. It was all sort of sly grog, everyone had a bloody flask...

LW: ...in and around the place...

WR: ...hidden everywhere, the toilets, and Christ knows what...

LW: ...the cisterns?

WR: Cisterns. Yeh...

LW: Did you have any doormen, or was it just the surf club members looked after it?

WR: No, there was never real drama. Except this one... There's a few fights, obviously, but this one had sort of brewed over a period of time and I forget, there were a couple of pretty handy blokes in the club at the time, and I remember one bloke, or a couple got into a few of these smarties... and then they went back and regrouped and the next week they came back with a big team. It was pretty heavy stuff...

DM: The Bronte Brawl...

WR: The coppers came... yeh it was big.

DM: In your dad's day would he have had to deal with things like that, as the one beach inspector on the beach?

WR: I doubt it, I don't remember any stories like that, I mean he probably had the odd encounter... but no, there was no...

DM: Was there rivalry between the beach inspectors and the surf clubs... or were they all [?]...

WR: No, certainly not, not at our beach anyway, I don't think so, I think they were all died-in-the-wool...

DM: They were all ex-surf club members, anyway weren't they, the majority I would think...

WR: Oh, yes of course,... the blokes that I knew... definitely.

DM: So your dad would have been a member of the Bronte surf club, before he, or at the time he started...

WR: Oh, yeh,... well, he was in Coogee, and that's the letter, explains what happens, he applied the job and he got it, so... I think probably that was one of the provisos... if you wanted to be a beach inspector at Bronte, you had to be a member of Bronte surf club. I think that, that letter almost...

LW: It sounds like it, doesn't it. With his resignation from the club...

WR: He resigned from Coogee...

LW: ...probably joined...

WR: ...to make sure he got the job.

LW: ...Bronte surf club.

EM: Was there rivalry back then between Bronte and Bondi about who was the first...

WR: Oh, of course...

DM: Who was the first surf club...?

EM: Surf club... yeh, it's still going on...

LW: That's in Australia too, the first surf club in Australia...

EM: In the world, I think...

DM: It gets bigger and bigger (laughter).

LW: You know now that Bronte reef there, is a protected zone... it's called an inter-tidal zone.

WR: On the northern side? No, where the bogey hole is...

LW: On the southern side... where the bogey hole is, that's protected so that it can't be stripped of all the...

WR: Marine life?

LW: ...marine life, there. Back in your early days, there, do you remember what people did - when the tide was out, and you could walk around the rocks - were they actively pulling the molluscs, the shellfish out of there?

WR: We did a lot of it. But I mean, not, we didn't denude the place, and the only time that happened, was when we became more cosmopolitan, and people came down, that realized you could eat it. We never ate any of that stuff.

EM: Like sea urchins...

WR: Yeh, sea urchins...

EM: All the Kiwi's used to eat them...

WR: We had a bloke in the [spaces], called Peter Bagnato...

EM: I know him...

WR: You know Peter...? Lovely bloke.

EM: I knew him... nice fellow.

LW: Bag of potatoes!

WR: He sort of introduced those to the people. In the spaces, he used to go down, of course, the Bronte, men's bogey as they call it, which is the one adjoining the pool was full of them. Gee you wouldn't dare put your foot down, you'd just end up with them through your foot. And he took them and cut the top off them, and he'd trying to get the guys to eat the roe out of them...

EM: I wouldn't eat the roe...

WR: they wouldn't touch it...

LW: And of course having a, coming from a Mediterranean background a lot of the people that were going down there and taking shellfish and what have you, it wasn't unusual for them to do that...

WR: Oh yeh, and they actually... in the end when they became more and more, when more and more of them arrived, they stripped the joint. There was no limpets, and there was no crabs.

That area behind, between, that men's bogey and the wall of where the old deck for the Bronte baths was, was all sort of rocks. If there was sort of sea on it, it wasn't under water, but certainly it wasn't drenched, the water would come over. And it would be alive with crabs, and if you were going fishing, you just walk down and grab half a dozen crabs...

LW: Big crabs...

WR: Yeh, there were those red rock crabs, red reef crabs or whatever they call them. And you know those little sort of brownie looking things... and you had miles of them. Then all of the sudden when they came there were none! He said, "this is for us." We use to make a bit of joke that it was Bagnato.

LW: But he was the start of it all...

WR: Yeh.

EM: He was always up at the Charing Cross hotel too...

WR: Yeh

LW: He was very involved in the Bronte Splashers.

WR: Yeh, he was a terrific bloke, a lovely fellow, he was a lovely man...

EM: and the Wrigglers... he was. Top bloke.

LW: they did the cooking on Sunday...

DM: And you recall big surf days coming in at Bronte, because you can get some pretty powerful waves out there...

WR: Oh, yeh, huge surf there. Used to enjoy that, actually.

DM: ...and around at Tamarama...?

WR: Yeh, Tamarama was yeh, I think that, it you know so narrow and it closes out all the time at Tamarama... further out is alright.

DM: Did a lot of people go to Tamarama – as, like you said, Bronte could sometimes, you could hardly move or get onto the beach because of the number of people who were there. Was Tamarama, has that ever been as popular... ?

WR: I don't sort of recall that. It was more of a, it has always been a bit of an exclusive place, Tamarama, hasn't it? It was sort of, don't know if the topless [birds] scared everyone away...

LW: It started off as an amusement park and that venture failed apparently in the mid-20's I think it was, wonderland city, then there's a sort of very – not black period, but a period when not a lot is heard about Tamarama beach.

WR: It's... not a user-friendly beach, is it, I mean from the point of view, you couldn't take kids there, because there's nowhere where you can put them in the water. Where at Bronte if there is a big sea, well they can all go swim in the bogey hole... or something like that but there's nothing like that at Tamarama. So maybe that was the reason.

DM: The club then was established at much the same time, wasn't it as the other, as Bronte and Bondi?

WR: They were pretty strong, they were a very good club, they were very good members...

DM: Wwhen you were competing?

WR: they had a couple of hotshots actually.

DM: Did they?

WR: ...the Marricks did, were the Marricks ever beach inspectors?

LW: I can't remember...

WR: There was two brothers Dick and Bob Marricks, I think... I think one of them won an Australian surf championship, or board championship, and they had a bloke called Philip [Dobney] who later went to North Bondi, who was a [?] swimmer. In fact they were pretty strong.

LW: I had some names here from a chap the other day, you'd remember, Alan Johnston, Johnno...

WR: I know, I see Johnno every now and then. He's up in QLD...

LW: I spoke to Johnno, the other...that's right... he's on the gold coast enjoying himself... but he spoke about some of the names that he remembers...

WR: Bluey Mays...

LW: But he remembers a lot further back. A fellow called Chooksie Brooks.

WR: Don't know him...

LW: ...and a fellow called Les Davidson...

WR: Yeh, I know Les Davidson ...

LW: Bluey Mays...

WR: Yeh, Bluey Mays.

EM: Can you say something about Bluey Mays, because I've got one of his surfboards...

WR: Oh, he was awful bastard (laughter).

EM: He was what?

WR: He was awful, he's a stand-over man, he was the Matt Young of those days. He was a big strong bloke... and we used to go out and try to catch waves and he would just ride all over the top of you...

EM: Oh wow.

WR: He was a bit of a...

EM: Did you know his son...Brad?

WR: I did, lovely bloke.

EM: So how was he like his Dad?

WR: Bluey was a nice bloke, he was a nice fella, it was just that he was pretty over handed with you, because he was so good... he was very good. But Brad was a lovely bloke, that was a real tragedy...

Yeh, couldn't believe that. Because we were up at the Gold Coast with a friend of his, and I remember he was the happiest bloke in the world.

EM: He wasn't very old, was he died...

WR: No, good-looking bloke, big, tall, different to Bluey, Bluey was short and nuggetty and red hair, and Brad was tall and, they were in business in Byron Bay, with...

EM: Making surf-boards...

WR: ...or shorts or something...

EM: Yeh, they were doing surfboards.

LW: They've done a lot of things.

WR: Yeh... I couldn't believe it...

LW: He was a beach inspector here...and he was also a...

WR: Was he?

LW: He was chief beach inspector at Randwick for a while...

WR: I didn't know that...

LW: ... based at Maroubra.

WR: Yeh, I only ran in with a bloke called Vic Ruckhurst was a good swimmer, I was up there and we went to a sort of party function thing and they were there...and I thought what a lovely bloke...

LW: He um, just talking about board riders, do you remember the names of some of the early ones that might have pioneered surfing on the big long boards over there...

WR: Wallace... Bill Wallace...

LW: Bill Wallace.

WR: He, there was he and ah, Gordon Woods... who's now over at Manly, and they were probably the two best, they were the long board builders, and if you wanted a long board you wouldn't go to anyone else. And then a few of them started from there, fellas like Barry Bennett and Norm Casey, and were a few further south that I didn't know much about. Probably, obviously they'd be up North. But in our area they were, Wallace was the board builder, he was a genius. And Gordon Woods, and he's up... he was a beach insp... you should try to contact him, he is one of the funniest blokes, he'd have a million stories...

LW: Might try to get in contact with him through Alan Johnston, and through the ...

WR: I've got his number at home somewhere.

LW: That'd be great. Do you recall from your times as a youngster and what you can recollect, when you would have seen the first board riders there, were they there in the '40's...?

WR: Oh, yeh. Yeh, I reckon.

LW: Riding the big redwood boards...

WR: There is a fabulous newsreel... and it was taken at Bronte, and there was a bloke in our club called Jeff Warne, remember that Warne's Wonder []? Remember they made all these things like, a special type of a dressing, and he used to put out Medical cabinets, and things like that. And his parents, and Jeff, so they had plenty of dosh, and Jeff used to always come down with a big board with a woman painted on the front of it... like a blue board with a bird painted on the front of it, and there's a photograph of him and another bloke called Keith Ferguson and Bill Wallace, and big huge surf at Bronte and they got photos riding into the beach...

LW: Would they've been fiberglass boards then?

WR: No, they were 16 footers...

LW: Proper redwoods...

WR: They were hollow, made out of [seaply]. They could ride, even those, they didn't turn them much. But they were the first sort of ones that I can recall...

LW: Just aim for shore and away you go...

WR: ...away you go... yeh, they were pretty hard to handle, as you could probably imagine. They were only about I think they were about 18-20 inches wide at the widest point, and 16 foot long... pretty heavy...

DM: Wouldn't want to get hit in the head with it...

WR: Pretty heavy, and they were sort of, came to a point at the back... only way you could stop'em was if they had a metal tail above them... (laughter) You couldn't stop'em in other words.

DM: So your dad had the role of trying to keep them separated from the swimmers?

WR: Yeh there weren't that many of them. I think early in the piece but probably they played the game a bit better there.

LW: They would have all been surf club members more than likely...

WR: Yeh, they were...so they, I would have thought they wouldn't have the same sort of problems there. They played the game and they just [give it a go] if there was a wave in the corner, you know, you didn't have too many blokes whipping around like that, so they'd come in outside the flags. Apart from, when the others came in, [boards] came in when the balsa boards came out, they came in '56... they brought, a lot of them brought them over, there was an Australian Surf Championship down at Torquay to coincide with the games, and a lot of them brought them over there, and it was the first time we'd seen that sort of thing.

LW: The lightweight balsa boards...?

WR: Balsa, and we couldn't get balsa here, so they built them hollow in the first instance, out of.. the same shape...

LW: Like a marine ply...

WR: Like marine ply, and then they found a source of balsa...

LW: Well, I mentioned the redwoods but I imagine the redwoods would be like the balsa in that we don't have redwoods here. And they would have been imported, someone would have brought them over on a trip...

WR: Yeh, someone, [] brought one over or something, didn't he originally...

LW: That's right. Over to Manly I think it was, so they were riding marine ply boards that were hollow inside.

WR: Yeh.

LW: I think that's it, Warren unless do you have...

DM: One quick other question I just going to clarify. There was a bandstand as I understand it, in Bronte and I've been told that it was moved on a few different occasions, it started off on the sand...

WR: Yeh, it did, it was on the stand. That's right. I don't know how that happened... whether they moved it from the park down to the stand or vice versa, because I remember at one stage we got a really big porpoise washed up, it had been attacked by shark. And they buried it under the thing...the ah...

DM: The Rotunda...

WR: The rotunda, and it stunk for years, for ages, I was only a kid then. That would be an interesting thing.

DM: I have seen one picture of it on, or very close to on the sand...

WR: It was on... You're dead right, maybe they moved it from there to the park...

DM: ...then they used to have apparently, Sunday afternoon bands...

WR: Yeh, the bands, they used to, the have local council brass band used to get up there and play.

DM: Just today, it's quite a quaint concept, really, isn't it, to have a band coming down on a Sunday afternoon... particularly as you said with so many people who would have been on the beach ...on a Sunday. It's all very civilized.

WR: Very... they'd probably get ragged (laughter...)

EM: []

LW: Well thanks very much Warren...

WR: Been a pleasure!

LW: ...for coming and sharing your recollections with us, and allowing us to look through the scrap book

WR: Not a worry...

LW: ...and copy it. And hopefully if there's anything that comes to mind in the future, you know where to get in contact with us...

WR: I'll try to get Billy Wallace, he would be, because he'd remember, he's a bit older than me, and he was down there. He'd be a good bloke to talk to. And he build the boards, he was one of the gurus of the board-building.

EM: Thanks.